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Publication Date

2019

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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

Santa Barbara

Female Wrestlers: Grappling the Head Locks of Oppression

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree Doctor of
Philosophy in Education

by

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September 2019

Female Wrestlers: Grappling the Headlocks of Oppression

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by
Terri Page Cecchine

DEDICATION

This piece of my life is dedicated to my mother, who supported me in wrestling the most anyone ever could. She may not be here at its ending, but she was always my number one fan from the beginning.

I also dedicate this journey to my advisor Dr. Mireles-Rios. Through 11 years of constant change, she believed I could do it, and I did! It would not have been possible without her.

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ABSTRACT

Female Wrestlers: Grappling the Head Locks of Oppression

by

Terri Page Cecchine

This study investigates the relationship between female athletes and their coaches. In particular, this study focuses on the perceptions of both coaches and athletes of Title IX and the treatment and experiences of females participating in male dominated sports. Seventy-Eight female high school wrestlers (mean age 16), were interviewed and surveyed about their thoughts and feelings of participating in a male dominated sport and how that experience shaped their thoughts of self. In addition, seven high school wrestling coaches from seven different schools were interviewed about their perspective of women in the sport, how has it changed over the last ten years, as well as how women are gaining accessibility and adding advantages to a traditionally, and physically male sport. Findings indicate that through battling male dominance and remaining persistent through physical pain and social oppression, women are creating a new idea of what it means to be an athletic woman, and what it means to be both mentally and physically strong. Implications from this study can provide coaches with a better understanding of how to approach the increasing number of female athletes. This is especially critical in the realm of physical sports, where women are carving out a space of their own as the mixed martial arts are gaining popularity.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

This study examines female athletes in wrestling. Further, I examined the relationship between young women and the male dominated sport of wrestling, and the coaches that guide the youth of both sexes in the sport. I sought to understand how the current social system in the sport shapes one's identity, if at all. Scholars demonstrate how identity is developed from a variety of variables. Examples such as Oyserman's (2006) discussion of the impacts of environment, and Messner's theories of gender discrimination and hegemony (2003) underline the reasons these issues exist, and how we can address the changes needed for the future if male dominance is to be broken.

Gender norms dominate social constructions of how males and females are defined in society (Dworkin & Messner, 2002; Krane, 2001). It is thought that violence has been a male attribute, which overlooks the fact that it is a learned behavior (Messner, 1990) and is suggested more to males in a variety of ways such as toys, words, songs, movies etc. Males tend to approach violence and aggressive sports in a different way than females do, and these perceptions are shaped from birth. Males are taught to be violent as part of learning to be masculine (Messner, 1990). After the passing of title IX, many more females participated in organized sports, although the "benefits" were outweighed by the disproportionate advantages historically enjoyed by the already privileged males (Stevenson, 2007). Female participation in male-dominated sports, such as wrestling, became a way for females to challenge social constructs of femininity.

In this study, I further analyze the relationship between young women and whether sport and environment shape their thoughts of self, their ability to develop healthy ideas about their sexuality, and help them gain self-confidence. I have seen these things in my own athletes, and have worked assiduously to educate others in this area as women's participation in male dominated sports, such as wrestling, is increasing. With strong female role models I am convinced these young female athletes can develop an enhanced sense of self.

Some scholars argue that wrestling exhibits women in particular and positive ways, while others argue it is a demoralizing sport that will perpetuate sexism through male hegemony. The research pushes and pulls against truths of what it means to be a female athlete in a male dominated sport. I am hopeful that I will be able to communicate to women in ways that will lift their consciousness, and help coaches better understand the female athletes true experience in this sport. In very young women, self-consciousness is generally very prominent, and I am interested to see if wrestling helps these women see past the superficiality of body type and feminine expectations. Findings from current studies inferred that girls are more influenced by advertising, television, and magazines when it comes to messages about ideal bodies (Messner, 2003; Peter & Valkenburg, 2007). This suggests that women are socialized to use their bodies to please others instead of their active qualities, such as accomplishing goals, or physical tasks in general. Examples such as wearing revealing uniforms in sports underlies the way in which sexuality trumps skill. In my study, the participants responses were well in accordance with gender stereotyping as both boys and girls considered boys tougher, more aggressive, and able to handle more pain than girls (Messner, 2003; Evans, 2006).

Additionally, this study aims to present information as to how and why these young girls' presence in the wrestling arena is significant to the sport. Questions remain about the influence of clothing on the mat. For example, how does the uniform, a singlet, affect the athletes self-esteem? Does male pressure exist and if so what are the results of their perception of it? Exploring these questions will contribute to us better understanding the multiple aspects of girls' experiences in wrestling and how others views of them have an impact.

As humans evolve and physicality comes to have new meanings, society's perceptions of the female body may change as well (Birrell & Cole, 1994). The 1972 passage of Title IX mandated equal rights for women's sports in education and served as a "game changer" in the sports world. Sports previously served as a reminder of male superiority and were a way to demonstrate that superiority, and as women now attempt to challenge male dominance the world of sports is taking on new meaning for its participants and its viewers (Macro, Viveiros & Cipriano, 2009). Sexuality has been challenged as well as gender norms and social constructions of one's capability in the arena of sports (McDermott, 2006; Blinde & Taub, 1992).

Along with this progressive change, there is an ongoing discussion about the hyper sexuality of women and how this affects performance and perception of ability (Lenskyj, 1986). This article discusses the sexuality of women in sports and in addition talks about the characteristics given to women who play sports. This study also mentions the presence of drug use which states that elite athletes are often stigmatized as individuals who take drugs to enhance performance. Lenskyj (1986) argues that the advent of both chromosome tests and steroid tests should primarily be seen as examples of male preference for "feminine" women

and a means of maintaining male hegemony in sport as well as society. She also talks about the sexualized and aesthetic images of the female body and gives an example of aerobic dancing in which women had to compete for male attention in the space, similarly to what was reported from the female athletes in my current study. The implementation of Title IX has increased attention on how and why women compete, and questions why successful women often have their integrity questioned.

Positionality

My research is based on my lived experience. I began participating in wrestling at age 12 when I was experiencing many obstacles in my life. This sport served as an outlet for me and taught me so many things about what it means to be successful, and why that is important. I am a petite and feminine woman, and I am questioned about my own sexuality constantly because of my interest in combative sports and my experiences with wrestling. My perspective is that women are traditionally isolated and not seen as formidable competitors due to a hypersexualized society, a lack of male physicality, and a lack of superiority in a male dominated space. Therefore, until we can rewrite the way males dominate historical spaces and policies that control underlying policies, I am not sure there will be equality in the spaces.

This is important to me because in my own experience I wrestled in high school for all four years, and became a wrestling coach while in my first year as an undergraduate at the University of California, Santa Barbara. While attending UCSB I coached co-ed wrestling at San Marcos High School for four years. As I progressed, and graduated, I started working at San Mateo high school while pursuing my Master's degree in San Francisco. During this time I observed and watched the mass discrimination the female athletes faced while just

trying to be part of the team. Females often do not comfortably fit into male dominated spaces in athletic realms because it challenges social constructs of what is male and female (Chimot & Loveau, 2010). I found I was also being marginalized and patronized to make me appear inferior to male coaches.

In my most recent coaching experience, I was at a Central Coast high school in California for 4 years. One or more of the coaches did not support females in a male space and made it very clear at every opportunity. This included incidents of exclusion, lack of information sharing, lack of significant responsibilities, more tedious tasks that should have been taught to athletes to complete. This most recent wrestling season (2018) I received a letter stating I would not be asked back to coach the girls or boys with a list of character traits they required for the job, none of which I apparently possessed. I tried for 4 years to start a girls program at that school, with constant push back against such a program. The administration was against females in male sport and made it clear they would not support a team. This letter was my reward for all the work I had put in. It was a reminder that it sometimes seems that very little progress has been made since the passing of Title IX in 1972. Not much has changed with male superiority and hegemony. Post implementation of title IX, the education of women athletes has not necessarily progressed as much as one may have thought or hoped for. Recently, I have found out that the school district did approve a girls team for the high school, and although this makes me very happy, it also makes me question their motivations.

In my own personal life, I currently actively compete in Brazilian Jiu Jitsu and in many cases the same stereotypes are perpetuated. Males possess testosterone driven reactions when grappling that help perpetuate a male superiority complex. If a male gets beaten by a

female in physical combat it puts into question both his manhood and her sexuality. I also experience validation from others when I have success due to my relationship with my male partner who is a higher belt and has trained for twenty years. The knowledge I possess is deemed valid because of my male partner and his opinion my work on the mat is legitimate.

Similarly, in the wrestling room, some situations arise where I am not validated due to the fact that I am a woman, despite my seventeen years of practicing this sport. It seems to some male coaches that I am not good enough, I do not know as much, and my words are worthless regardless of the circumstances or facts at hand. These are the subconscious beliefs about how women are less capable in contact sports, thus placing the idea of ability on gender and not on skill. This presents the dilemma of hyper-sexualization that impacts women's identity development (Dworkin & Messner, 2002; Krane, 2001), as often women are viewed for their appearance, not their contribution to the team. These microaggressions and blatant acts of sexism are very common for females in this field and I wish to further analyze how these actions affect the athletes through the lens of role modeling. If the best way we can assist our youth is through role modeling (Oyserman, 2006) then what messages are those acts sending to the student-athletes both male and female?

Research Questions

Research Question #1:

How does gender validation affect female athletes who serve in traditionally, athletic, male roles?

Recently in sport there has been a shift to a desire to “show what you can do” and end the perpetuated cycles of gender inequality that limits women to feminine roles (Krane, 2001). In sports the amount of female competitors has increased, but the total number of

female participants is still extremely low in comparison to males. Staurowsky (2010) stated that in 1971 294,015 females competed across all sports compared to 2002 where the number was over 2.8 million, with a rise of over 847 percent. Females were first documented in wrestling in 1985 (Young, 2006) which reported a total of 6 female wrestlers in comparison to 244, 598 male wrestlers. By 1999, there had been an increase to 2,361 female wrestlers compared to 235, 973 male wrestlers, with most recent counts being over 11,000 high school female wrestling athletes. These numbers are still shockingly low, but this is still a step forward.

Despite the fact that numbers are growing and women will likely become more observable in the world of male dominated sports (Young, 2006; Videon, 2002), sports such as wrestling, grappling, martial arts, boxing, football etc. are so masculinized that the probability of them being claimed by women is exponentially low (Cahn, 1994). This is assumed to be true due to women's inability to match the strength of their male peers (Bryson, 1987). Physical sport tends to privilege straight men while marginalizing women through perceptions of what "real" sports are, and seem to perpetuate how few women can compete in this type of environment (Bryson, 1987). Ultimately the double standard also exists for those who do compete in a male-dominated sport, their efforts often devalued because of the qualifiers attached to all statements regarding physical performance. For example, microaggressions such as "you're strong, for a girl", "you work out a lot, for a girl" etc. are so common that it is obvious why women are discouraged from excelling in these environments (Dworkin & Messner, 2002). Similar to the muscle gap conversation, other biological differences are always topics of discussion when the subject is athletic skill. When looking toward a feminist movement in sport, a desire to understand physicality within the

context of women's abilities is necessary. Susan Birrell (1994) continues this conversation of the gender gap, not based on if it exists, but rather how the gender gap is understood and taken into popular consciousness in our society. Some argue this issue is not a bias of gender capability; rather it is gender bias of sexual domination that determines how the gender gap is understood (Messner, 2003).

Messner (1988) brings to light how sports create a contested woman's body. Essentially, women are not in control of their own bodies, due to lack of ability, lack of self-definition, and imposed sexuality (Blinde & Taub, 1992). Gender roles are defined and placed in the forefront over skill. Women athletes are viewed as sexual beings over athletes and the standards of feminized beauty are still emphasized even in the case of women's bodybuilding (Messner, 2006; Leng, Kang, Lim, Lit, Suhaimi & Umar, 2012).

Research shows that other countries have progressed past the inequality and accept that women can compete. Curby and Jomand (2015) suggest wrestling has been historically significant for many countries, and often women wrestlers are seen as just as important as their male peers. In many different cultures, the sport is not only used for determining marriage rituals in African tribes, it dates back to ancient Greece where Spartan women would wrestle, as would their daughters, for class status.

Research Question #2:

What are the repercussions and obstacles faced by female athletes who participate at schools who are not in Compliance of Title IX?

Microaggressions seemed to round every corner, from not allowing females to compete to not providing uniforms to females when they were provided to males. The

females would have to switch singlets mid tournaments as they were forced to share, and they had to share other equipment as well. The motivation to promote these girls' teams was lacking and the young ladies were and still are suffering from this.

In current literature we have seen some movement toward an increase in women's access and comfort in these male spaces, thus increasing a sense of belonging. However, due to the long run of male domination and patriarchy, a consensus in the literature concludes it will take longer than expected to break free from the train of hegemonic thought and learn to accept women for their abilities in the fields they are seeking, not abilities in domesticated roles. Allowing women the space to freely express their capabilities will be the only way to venture towards a less patriarchal society.

Future studies would need to be done on current youth to determine at what stages these women feel accepted or excluded as well as a more thorough understanding of why women join male sports. As well as a more in depth understanding of how both women and men in the realm of sports exhibit unexamined gender issues that affect the way women are accepted and expected to perform (Videon, 2002; Krane, 2001). In addition, a consideration of how the environment shapes their individual development and what the motivations are to be successful in a space where not many women have previously ventured would be very beneficial to the current data and research on females in male sports. Zhu and Tse (2014) write about how possible environments play a role in student's perception of self. Not only that, but these youths must then imagine what is possible and take action to reach their goals. If this is valid, then immersing them in an environment where young women feel empowered would yield more independent and intrinsically motivated females.

Primarily, researchers have studied how academic progress is affected by student environments and supported by sports involvement. However, there are many holes in current theories as to why and how women are treated the way they are in the realm of athletics, and these variables are vital to understanding sexism in the lives of our student-athletes. A deeper look at what drives these students to become athletes despite such formidable circumstances could lead researchers to a deeper understanding of character development, academic success, and many other variables, as well as a more expansive understanding of minority experience from the perspective of gender.

In my most recent year coaching I had 4 young ladies who wrestled in the heavier weight classes. What I saw in them and how they transformed over the year left me in awe and furthered my interest in how wrestling transforms image and thoughts of self. These young ladies were initially timid and developed into stronger and more confident females in a male world. Through the season they became more comfortable wearing the spandex singlet which was initially a cause of concern for 2 of them. This change in feelings of self and confidence in body image are huge steps and are very meaningful when it comes to the role of the coach in a sport such as this. As a point of interest I would like to further examine the relationship between female coaches and the young women's identity with self and body image. Theories of identity development state that outside influences play a huge role in the development of sexuality and motivations for success. The role of the coach also plays a critical role, as scholars have shown (Kang & Stangl, 1991; Turman, 2010; Lyndon, et. al, 2011)

Another example of mental transformation was the ability of one athlete to wrestle above her weight due to the way the weight classes were organized; only one athlete may

compete at each weight class. She weighed 189 lbs but due to the fact another girl was the same weight but could out wrestle her, she had to wrestle in the heavier weight classes, upwards of 60 lbs over her own size. Therefore this girl had to wrestle at Heavyweights. This was challenging as she would wrestle females that weighed up to 250 pounds. Not only did she step up to the challenge, she progressed the furthest and ended up placing at the Masters tournament. This solidifies the hypothesis that strong coaches can influence athletes successes.

Current research focuses primarily on the negative ways in which media perpetuates gender roles through their coverage and through male gaze (Walton, 2003). Women are seen as things and not people. The media is very influential in the ways sports are seen as masculine or feminine as well. Messner (2003) offers an analysis of the ways sports hypersexualize women over acknowledging their skill as athletes. He uses a conceptual/historical framework of gender roles within a reflexive theory of sport, culture and ideology to identify how and why these issues exist in our social norms. Sport allows for the perpetuated battle of masculinity versus femininity (Walton, 2003; Birrell & Cole, 1994). My research will seek to examine and analyze how the relationship between coaches and athletes will allow these young women to feel less affected by these variables. These gender disparities are often unspoken, yet perpetuated through media exploitation and hypersexualization, unequal treatment, and lack of support. Both women and men in the realm of sports exhibit unexamined gender issues that affect the way women are accepted and perform (Videon, 2002; Krane, 2001). These are the unconscious beliefs about how women are less capable in contact sports, thus placing the idea of ability on gender and not on skill. This presents the dilemma of hyper-sexualization that impacts women's identity development

(Dworkin & Messner, 2002; Krane, 2001), as often women are viewed through the prism of appearance, not their contribution to the team. Offering one extreme or the other, women are positioned in such a way where skill is trumped by social expectations of femininity and beauty. For example, girls only have two options of feminine or masculine and cannot present themselves as both (Walton, 2005; Krane, 2001).

I argue that these female athletes are torn between a world of displacement and struggle for acceptance when participating in wrestling. The more experienced the women in the field become, the more they are aware of the inequality present in their ability to compete and practice in the same space as their male peers. Because of this, some female athletes are creating their own meaning of “appropriate” female behaviors (Krane, 2001). But what does this mean for our younger female athletes who have not learned to cope with such an environment? Male dominance is an obstacle in physical competition. The social aspect of what it means to be male or female and accepted as one or the other, not both, is my point of interest. I also plan to investigate how the coaching relationship with female wrestlers is a vital component of healthy development in these young ladies.

Chapter 2: Related Literature & Theoretical Framework

In an exploration of how the literature has examined females in male dominated sports it is evident that society makes it challenging for females to compete in these sports. Reviewing the literature in this area is important because it provides one way of understanding why and how women's identity develops in a predominantly male environment, and how important the environment is to identity development (Oyserman, 2006). In the context of this study, understanding the possible outcomes of how women develop in their environment is vital to enable female athletes to continue to be successful in wrestling.

In 2019, CIF (California Interscholastic Federation) declared and supported that the boys and girls State Wrestling tournaments run simultaneously. These two tournaments have always been separate until this year, which had caused a variety of issues for coaches and families who may have multiple athletes playing in separate tournaments. The energy when you walk into the gymnasium for such a high level tournament is unlike any other you can experience. The stakes are not the only thing that are high; so is the anxiety. The stares of passion are everywhere; fear, vengeance, love of competition, all of these things drive these young female athletes to compete. The loud speaker sounds with the announcement for the 138 pound weight class to report to the staging area. The girls who are in this weight class all gather their headgear and mouthpieces. Most also carry a water bottle or a music device, their phone, something to distract them from waiting in line for their time on the mat. The girls waiting have every expression you can imagine from extreme determination to absolute confusion as to what they are even doing here. Based on these experiences, I draw on the literature focusing on the following topics: on gender validation in male sport. Following

the literature review, I include two theories I use to frame this study: Oyserman's Theory of environment's influence on possible selves and Messner's Theory of Female hypersexualization.

Theoretical Frameworks

Females physically dominating males in a physical way offers a challenge to male conditioned superiority, which assumes that girls who are physically strong in order to be female and attractive, cannot be capable of hurting another in such an aggressive and combative way. The language used often supports a dominant sexual culture where males are in control (Tracy & Erkut, 2002). Men are usually taught that they must be physically strong to be a man, and women have to be fragile to be feminine. Women's lives are primarily structured by gender power (Young, 2003), thus making physical sport unacceptable for females. However, this dichotomy has been broken since women continue to infiltrate the world of male-dominated contact sports (Tracy & Erkut, 2002). The current research on this topic suggests a few theories as to the reasons why females have not been fully accepted into the male sports world. Some argue that women are fragile and should be protected by men, not brutalized (Bryson, 2003); that women will never be able to do what men can do (Messner, 1988, Young, Deaner & Marks, 2006); that it is not socially acceptable for a man to physically attack a woman and pin her to the ground or seek a submission position (Macro, Viveiros & Cipriano, 2009).

This study utilizes Oyserman's (2006, 2011) framework in which outside forces such as parents influence what children see in themselves and what is possible. Applied to this study, I seek to understand how high school female wrestlers in the field of male wrestling

perceive their own identity and future selves. I will draw on the theories of Messner (2003) that discuss male dominance in social aspects as well as physical sports specifically.

Women in Male Sports, Policy and Title IX

Sports involvement for women has been increasing exponentially since the eighties. Women have begun to use their bodies in ways that contest the accepted social order of male domination in sports (Messner, 1988). Females did not comfortably fit into male dominated spaces in athletic realms because it challenged the social constructs of what is male and female (Chimot & Loveau, 2010). After the passing of title IX, more females began participating in organized sports, although the “benefits” were outweighed by the disproportionate advantages historically enjoyed by the already privileged. (Stevenson, 2007). Since the passing of Title IX the number of women in male dominated sports has grown somewhat, and continues to do so (Walton, 2003; Young, 2006; Lenskyj, 1990). Many more sports teams as well as employment in sports were opened to women after the passing of Title IX, making a beginning in closing the gender gap that has been oppressing women across the world, and opening more opportunities for women throughout the world of sports (Long & Caudill, 1991). With this increase in participation, many other issues have arisen, as more female competitors desire to compete in more physical sports such as wrestling, boxing, football, and rugby (Young, 2006; Dworkin & Messner, 2002; Cooky, 2009). The purpose of this paper is to further explore the gender disparities that still exist in the world of athletics. These gender disparities are often unspoken, yet perpetuated through media exploitation and hyper-sexualization, unequal treatment, lack of support. Both women and men in the realm of sports exhibit unexamined gender issues that affect the way women

perform and are accepted in sport (Videon, 2002; Krane, 2001). These are the unconscious beliefs about women's capabilities in contact sports, thus placing the notion of ability on gender and not on skill. This presents the dilemma of hyper-sexualization that impacts women's identity development (Dworkin & Messner, 2002; Krane, 2001), as often women are viewed for their appearance, not their contribution to the team. Offering one extreme or the other, women are positioned in such a way where skill is trumped by social expectations of femininity and beauty. For example, girls must identify either as feminine or masculine and cannot present themselves as both (Walton, 2005; Krane, 2001).

Justifications for Excluding Women

Walton (2005) offers many perspectives as to why the female wrestler is problematic. Females dominating males in a physical way offers a challenge to male conditioned superiority, which assumes that girls who are physically strong and pretty cannot be capable of hurting another in such a violent and combative way. The language being used supports a dominant sexual culture where males are in control (Tracy and Erkut, 2002). Men are often taught that they must be physically strong to be a man, and women have to be fragile to be feminine. However, this dichotomy has been broken since women continue to infiltrate the world of male-dominated contact sports (Tracy and Erkut, 2002). The current research on this topic suggests a few theories as to the reasons why females have not been fully accepted into the male-dominated sports world. Some argue that women are fragile and should be protected by men, not brutalized (Bryson, 2003), that women will never be able to do what men can do (Messner, 1988, Young, Deaner & Marks, 2006), that it is not socially acceptable for a man to physically attack a woman and pin her to the ground or seek a submission position (Macro, Viveiros and Cipriano, 2009).

All of these theories, while they claim to be at the disposal of and for the protection of the women and aimed to support the needs of women, just lead to the further marginalization of women, polarizing the two genders and concepts of gender roles with the result of increasing the power men hold in our society (Macro, Viveiros and Cipriano, 2009). These claims suggest women always need a protector and are incapable of independent thought and action. They challenge women's abilities to be capable of anything exceptional physically, and perpetuate feelings of inferiority among women.

Media Influence on Gender Roles

As Walton (2007) points out, the media tends to propagate these gender norms and social assumptions as to what is acceptable. Thus, when a female does something she is not supposed to do (as dictated by social norms/media), for example, wrestling a boy, she upsets the social order people are comfortable with. In 2003, Walton, in an examination of title IX, implied that wrestling has become an out for coaches and administrators as title IX requires separation of genders and equal opportunities for sports, and sports such as wrestling tend to integrate the two (Stevenson, 2007). Whereas football and wrestling are the last two male-dominated thresholds, most states fight against combined male and female wrestling. In fact, only two states, Texas and California, offer opportunities for girls in state wrestling tournaments. Young (1997) provides a clear examination of how women face greater challenges than men in wrestling through discussion of hegemony and provides an example given concerning competition rights in the sport.

Despite an increase of women in wrestling, the challenges remain; women still have a "disadvantage in strength, disadvantage in making weight, a lack of social support, and feeling they receive a less quality practice or that they are taking up space" (Walton, 2003).

As the sport grows, these concerns will need to be addressed and resolved. There have been a few incidents in coed wrestling where gender discrimination has been faced. One incident was in February 2000 when Keristen Labelle was the first female to qualify for the boy's state championship tournament in Michigan. She was covered in the media and was described as an exception to the rule that female wrestlers must be masculine. As she appeared to be feminine and heterosexual, these were the qualities that were consistently represented in media as main points of interest over her athletic ability. However, the biggest issue that has sparked the conversation around female wrestlers in male competitions, and in the sport in general, came eleven years later in February 2011 in an article written by Albert Mohler. A male athlete, Joel Northrup, refused to wrestle a female, Cassy Herkelman, in the Iowa state championships. Reports claim that the most emasculating thing that can happen to a young boy would be to lose to a girl in a physical capacity by being pinned to the mat. Northrup refused to wrestle Herkelman based on her gender and he defended this by stating it was against his religion. In the news report by Albert Mohler (2011), Northrup was praised by most for his decision, although there were some dissenting responses that raised further questions about the inequitable outcome. The defense that his religion prevented him from "hurting" a girl erroneously assumed that she was incapable of physical success although she had already beaten many boys in prior matches in order to qualify for such a high-status tournament. The boy's position was not backed with valid facts and overall just highlighted the underlying sexist messages and inequitable treatment of the sport by emphasizing how women and girls are still fighting for respect to be able to compete in a physically demanding activity. The Mohler article also presented another interesting perspective, by suggesting that the way to respect a female as a wrestler would be not to forfeit to her and instead, give her

the best you have. A fair match would offer equality on many levels, not dominance, despite the outcome. Mohler also pointed out the excuses that were given to defend the boy's right to not wrestle a girl. This, in turn, devalued all the legitimate wins Herkelman had gained to qualify for this tournament.

Media is very influential in the ways sports are seen as masculine or feminine as well. Messner (2003) offers an analysis of the ways sports hypersexualize women over acknowledging their skill as athletes. He uses a conceptual/historical framework of gender roles within a reflexive theory of sport, culture and ideology to identify how and why these issues exist in our social norms. Sport allows for the perpetuated battle of masculinity versus femininity (Walton, 2003; Birrell, S., & Cole, C. L., 1994). Leng and Kang (2012) further discuss these gender issues in which they studied a focus group with 8 participants, 5 of which were female. A survey was also sent to 155 participants, 56% were female. The purpose of the study was to see how youth view wrestling in the media and how females are highlighted in the world of sports. The results demonstrated that females see wrestling differently than males. Wrestling is seen as violent so it is automatically deemed a masculine sport (McDermott, 1996). This generally attracts more male viewers and participants. This makes the sport less attractive to women, thus pushing them even further from a willingness to participate. This study emphasized the strength requirement in physicality and since women could not possess this, sports for women usually promoted slim bodies and the sexuality of the female. Wrestling overall was viewed more as an entertainment than sport (Leng and Kang, 2012).

Hardin (2009) suggests in "The influence of gender roles, socialization and media use", a survey of 340 college students, that environment and socialization play a large role in

how sexuality is perceived and who has the power to define it. The survey was administered to further understand how youths see sports through media influence as well as their own bias in the idea of sports ideologies. Environments play a huge role in identity development and for these female athletes the media environment shapes the way they are viewed and over sexualized, versus praised for their skill set in the sport. 230 of the 340 interviewees were female and reported sports are masculine. Wrestling was not mentioned in this article, and with the even lower numbers of females in combat sports the percentage of perceived masculinity is sure to increase (Leng, Kang and Lim, 2012). I will be using Oyserman's theory of possible selves (2006, 2011) as guiding theories (in the next chapter) to discuss further how environmental factors shape attitude and opinion toward women and self in sport.

Messner (2003) refers to the ways women are silenced in the male world, thus further marginalizing female athletes. Women are expected to shine for their feminine beauty, not for physical strength (Birrell, S., & Cole, C. L., 1994). For a woman to follow the hegemonic social order, participating in such arenas is not acceptable (Walton, 2005). Males still dominate a world of sports where they serve as coaches, higher level athletes, mentors and teammates. The facilities in which women compete as well as the institution of sports are all controlled by men, thus further deepening the hold of misogyny (Hanson & Kraus, 1998; Birrell & Cole, 1994).

Women as Sexualized Objects

Women generally are the sexualized objects that paternal society wants to see as desirable to men (Messner, 2003). The gender gap is understood in many ways and when ideals of womanhood are confronted there is tension between male and female perception of

women's roles (McDermott, 2006; Blinde & Taub, 1992). Male Domination in sports is a prominent idea that pervades many social constructs and contexts. Messner (2003) discusses increased female athleticism having created a quest for athletic equality and control over one's own body. Women can now decide how they want to feel, how strong they want to be and how they participate in physical activity. Women and their bodies are "contested ideological terrain", as women's bodies are made differently and not built for the same use as men's bodies (Messner, 1988). As humans evolve and physicality comes to have new meanings, the ways in which society sees a woman's body may change as well (Birrell & Cole, 1994). The 1972 passage of Title IX mandated equal rights for women's sports in education and served as a "game changer" in the sports world. Sports previously served as a reminder of male superiority and were a way to demonstrate that superiority, and now that women are attempting to challenge male dominance, the world of sports is taking on new meaning for its participants and its viewers (Macro, Viveiros and Cipriano, 2009). Sexuality has been challenged as well as gender norms and social constructions of who is capable of what (McDermott, 2006; Blinde, E. M., & Taub, D. E., 1992).

Messner (1988) illuminates how sports create a contested woman's body. Essentially, women are not in control of their own bodies, due to lack of ability, lack of self-definition, and imposed sexuality (Blinde & Taub, 1992) . Gender roles are defined and placed in the forefront over skill. Women athletes are viewed as sexual beings over athletes and the standards of feminized beauty are still emphasized even in the case of women's bodybuilding (Messner, 2006; Leng, et. al, 2012). Despite the best efforts of two generations of women in sport, the expectation is still lean, long feminine muscles, not bulky and bulging as in their male counterparts. So even in a world where having muscles is expected and encouraged,

these women are valued for perceived beauty, not their strength (Messner, 2006; Birrell, S., & Cole, C. L., 1994).

Implicit Messaging

Hidden messages exist in male dominant sports such as wrestling (Young, 1997). Women are not treated equally to their male counterparts and are often excluded and isolated on the wrestling mat. A study was done in Russia (Brake, 2012) where participants were observed over a six month period, in a group that was limited to 4 boys and 3 girls, ages 13 to 21. The surveys were given at the end of these observations based on those who attended practices and tournaments most frequently and had the most experience in the sport. The purpose was to determine how acceptability played a factor in participation. Results demonstrated the females felt isolated, excluded and often as if they “were taking up space”. This feeling is not uncommon among female athletes as the physical worlds are controlled by male superiority (Brake, 2012).

One counter-example was found by Kevin Young (1997) when he discusses how women feel about injury in sport, violence and physicality. Women overall did not feel very oppressed by their own gender, while different opinions surfaced for perceived male oppression. One common factor that was missing from all other studies was that most of these female athletes had family support and, most importantly, male support, which furthered their confidence. In general it was found that the sport was mocked and many would make comments comparing the sport to mud wrestling, thus insinuating that the public eye does not take the women’s sport seriously (Hardin, 2009). Although this negative outside perspective still exists, these women felt stronger simply based on the fact they had male

support as equals. This is an example of how important it is to have gender dichotomy removed from athletics, so the sport can be the focus point, not the gender.

It is also logical that those who feel support from the environment will be more successful. Research found that those females who felt comfortable, welcomed and pushed to success did not see the gender dichotomies, thus allowing them to perform using skill not gender roles.

Problem Documentation

According to Videon (2002) there were only 294,015 females participating in sports in the eighties, and by 1999 this number had grown to 2,675,874. The most current statistics on female wrestlers on NCWA online states, “Since 1994, the number of women who wrestle in high school has grown from 804 to over 11,496”. Although, this is a large leap for gender equality as the decade progressed, women’s participation has not grown equally in all capacities, sports [wrestling] being one arena where women are still discouraged to participate due to gender differences (Sisjord, 1997). When looking at sport through a lens of gender inequality it is easy to see how combat sports and more physical sports such as football, rugby, wrestling, boxing and mixed martial arts are more attractive to males given their historical interest in violence and more intimidating to females given their traditional societal upbringing.

Over the past few decades, more interest has been placed on the examination of women’s positionality in the world of male sports. There has been a recent increase in the numbers of women who are participating in predominantly male sports, and this has created a need for further investigation and deeper understanding of how these roles affect identity development and ideas of self due to environmental circumstances (Oyserman, 2006).

Primarily, researchers have studied how academic progress is affected by student environments and supported by sports involvement. Shifrer, Pearson, Mueller and Wilkonson (2005) authored a most relevant study on this topic. They created a 3-step study that involved 10th graders from 1980, 1990 and 2002. This three-fold approach was significant as it created opportunities for researchers to explore multiple variables concerning race and identity. It allowed them to expose different generations of student experiences, it demonstrated changing social constructs and proved how sports involvement increased academic motivation. In general all of these studies included in the compilation presented similar inquiries. Researchers have been exploring how feelings of self-worth are influenced by sports, how lessons learned in sports transferred into academic motivation, and how outside influences change the space in which the subject practiced sport (Oyserman, 2006).

Recently, however, there has been a shift in desire to “show what you can do” and end the perpetuated cycles of gender inequality that limits women to feminine roles (Krane, 2001). In sport the amount of female competitors has increased, but the total number of female participants is still extremely low in comparison to males. Staurowsky (2010) stated that in 1971 294,015 females competed across all sports compared to 202 where the number was over 2.8 million, with a rise of over 847 percent. Females were first documented in wrestling in 1985 (Young, 2006) which reported a total of 6 female wrestlers in comparison to 244, 598 male wrestlers. In 1999, there had been an increase to 2,361 female wrestlers compared to 235, 973 male wrestlers. With most recent counts being over 11,000 high school female wrestling athletes. As these numbers are still shockingly low, this is a step forward. Presently the numbers are growing and women will be more observable in the world of male dominated sports (Young, 2006; Videon, 2002).

Causative Analysis: Sports and Academic Success

In line with traditional research many researchers such as Finn (1997), and Comeaux, E., & Harrison, C. K. (2011), demonstrate a mainstream focus on race and gender and the influence on academic success and athletic competence. Sports involvement was shown to increase confidence in academic settings for all males, and it was especially high for African American males (Young, 1992) . But this research also showed that strong academic requirements might deter students of color from applying for schools as they may not perform as well as their white counterparts or have the resources to gain such academic success. Sports involvement was associated with high college enrollment, for White males and females, Latino males and females, and African-American males but not females. Overall, the results were not necessarily correlated to gender, as outcomes were dependent on social constructions, and the idea of self (Oyserman, 2006). However the findings suggest females do not feel as comfortable or as confident as their male peers regardless of color, ethnic group or social status.

Generally, sports involvement was shown to develop increased feelings of worthiness, attention to school involvement and feelings of inclusion (Young & Sowa, 1992; Murphy, Petitpas, & Brewer, 1996). It was found that students develop confidence from sports that may also help them advocate for themselves on college applications. Women in general participated less than their male counterparts. Fewer females reported being recruited for college or athletic teams, compared to their male counterparts and in general there was a lesser value placed on female athletes. This devaluing of female athletes does not stray far from the norms of heterosexuality, patriarchy and hegemony.

Dominating Gender Roles

Gender norms dominate social constructions of how male and female are defined in world culture (Dworkin and Messner, 2002; Krane, 2001). Female participation in male-dominated sports, such as wrestling, is a way for females to challenge such social constructs. Curby and Jomand (2015) suggest wrestling has been historically significant for many countries, and often women wrestlers are seen as just as important as their male peers. In many different cultures, the sport is not only used for determining marriage rituals in African tribes, it dates back to ancient Greece where Spartan women would wrestle, as would their daughters, for class status. Physical and mental strength has always been important for both men and women in the athletic world. Recently this idea of male dominance has shifted, and the significance of the female in sports has changed to include the beginning of acceptance of a more assertive role for women (Dworkin & Messner, 2002). This cultural change will be necessary for the acceptance of female athletes in traditionally male roles.

It is thought that violence has been a male attribute which overlooks the fact that it is a learned behavior (Messner, 1990) and is suggested more to males through a variety of ways such as toys, words, songs, movies etc. Males tend to approach violence and violent sports in a different way than females do, these perceptions are shaped from birth. Males are essentially blank slates and are taught to be violent, and masculine (Messner, 1990).

Women Lack Physicality to Compete

Researchers acknowledge that gender roles are socially constructed and boys from early on are encouraged to use their physicality . For example, Bryson (1987) speaks prominently of how men are valued for use of aggression, violence, and force in physical sport. Sports such as wrestling, grappling, martial arts, boxing, football etc. are so masculinized that the probability

of them being reclaimed by women is exponentially low (Cahn, 1994). This is assumed to be true due to women's inability to make themselves strong enough to compete (Bryson, 1987). Physical Sport tends to privilege straight men and marginalize women with perceptions of what "real" sports are, and how few women can compete in this type of environment (Bryson, 1987). Ultimately the double standard also exists for those who do compete in a male-dominated sport, their effort often devalued because of the qualifiers attached to all statements regarding physical performance. For example, microaggressions such as "you're strong, for a girl", "you work out a lot, for a girl" etc. are so common that it is obvious why women are discouraged from excelling in these environments (Dworkin and Messner, 2002). Similar to the muscle gap conversation, other biological differences are always topics of discussion when the subject is athletic skill. When looking toward a feminist movement in sport, a desire to understand physicality within the context of women's abilities is necessary. Susan Birrell (1994) continues this conversation of the gender gap, not based on if it exists, but rather how the gender gap is understood and taken into popular consciousness in our society. Some argue this issue is not a bias of gender capability; rather it is gender bias of sexual domination that determines how the gender gap is understood (Messner, 2003).

McDermott (1996) addresses an analysis of physicality as a conceptual idea, and this idea as a tool for feminism needs to be further developed. A new understanding is called for. How women have to live in their bodies is claimed by men through social acceptability and pressure to conform into a sexualized being for acceptance, and this agency is a huge factor in developing equality in all realms, including sport (Walton, 2003; Birrell & Cole, 1994). By defining physicality as male prowess just further perpetuates hegemony (Fair, 2011). These authors offer interesting theories of how physical appearance and ability are separated

by social implications of strength and of gender norms. Female physicality questions the appearance, sexuality and process of which female athletes are socialized into male dominated sports (Walton, 2003). There needs to be a way to examine strength and gender neutrality in the same context. Women's lives are primarily structured by gender power (Young, 2003). The theory of female physical inferiority does not, however, apply to men who are not physically superior, only to women of any strength level (Birrell & Cole, 1994). This dichotomy proves that the differences are not focused on physical incapability as much as gender (Messner, 2006). Physicality does, but should not mean very different things for men and for women.

The way society functions today men are assumed to be superior and are expected to succeed in physical sports such as football, wrestling, combat etc. (Blinde & Taub, 1992). Men are generally not accustomed to facing physical challenges against females, as they do in wrestling. If such an event occurs, it brings into question the male opponent's masculinity while at the same time questions the female's feminine qualities (Sisjord, 1997). As wrestling is a physically demanding sport, often males are not approving of females participating and sometimes succeeding. The question of emasculation of the male gender based on perceived abilities is a social construct based on society's definition of what male and female is supposed to be (Tracy & Erkut, 2002). In such a male-dominated world, it may be hard to see where and how women can play a key role in the growth and development of more equity in sport and in the perception of gender generally. However, Curby and Jomand (2015) present a vital point of how women "saved" wrestling in the Olympics. Wrestling was voted out in 2011, for the 2016 Olympics. Women continued to compete at regional and national levels and gained attention for the sport. The global market continued to grow and women

demonstrated that they could compete at the same level as their male counterparts. They also pointed out the historical importance of the sport. Eventually, they were able to advocate for inclusion of Wrestling in the Olympics, and were largely responsible for bringing it back for the 2020 and 2024 Olympics (Curby, 2015).

Despite these best efforts, researchers are still uncovering unfortunate truths about how society feels when women play certain roles normally occupied by males. This exhibits the need for further research on how women cope with sexism in sport and how coaches can learn to work with capabilities and not deter based on gender or perceived ability.

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the numbers are growing and women will be more observable in the world of male dominated sports (Young, 2006; Videon, 2002).

Environment and Possible Selves

Adolescents are socialized from an early age to identify as either male or female (Oyserman & Fryberg, 2006). Therefore, much of their identity revolves around characteristics, identity attributes and personality traits socially constructed as acceptable for males or females. Adolescents depend on a variety of role models and environmental factors, all with the possibility of influencing their future self (Oyserman, 2003). Possible selves are discussed by Oyserman as being all the possible futures a youth can envision for themselves and how they create the trajectory to achieve it. The variables of emotional development, environment, male gaze (or scrutiny), and gender perceptions were found to be the main factors in determining the outcome of possible selves. Further research needs to be done to examine how these variables shape ideas of self, specifically in the sport of wrestling. The most successful ways to aid in youth development were through role modeling and informal goal setting as these allowed youth to feel accepted, heard, and visualize what they could possibly be.

Emotional Differences

The socialization of children shapes the way emotions are exhibited (Genais, Hillard & Vescio, 2010). For example a boy might show anger, while a girl may cry. If a boy cries, then he is being weak, especially so in sports (Messner, 2006). This frame of mind is socialized from birth and reinforces the inequity in choices when given a gender identity. These messages present themselves in media, environment, social interactions etc. and may

take the form of blue versus pink, difference in toy production and product sales, and gender roles sold in movies and music.

In an empirical study, Jansz (2000) used the statements of white, middle class men from Western Europe, the United States, and Canada. The study focused on the relationship between masculine identity and emotions, more specifically “restrictive emotionality.” Jansz identified that the attributes of “what it is to be a man” (or a boy) is communicated in multiple ways, and therefore, the communicative interaction between the young boy and his surroundings are internalized resources of masculinity. In sports, the idea of perpetual dominance insists males have a masculine sense of self. Jansz (2000) argues that the general inhibition of emotions among men is not “given” in men’s nature, but rather the result of a lack of practice and negative reinforcement toward anything not perceived as male. Thus, as soon as parents know their child is male the social construction of masculine identity starts as parents and others attribute gender characteristics to the infant (Brown & Deikman, 2010).

Adult men will undergo a restricted kind of emotionality when they reconstruct their own identities (Brown & Deikman, 2010). Men typically prefer other forms of socializing such as arguing, because that is a way that they release emotions and feel social connections with other people. While females may exhibit similar behavior, the perception of the two genders are very different. The dichotomy is that females are characterized as being too emotional or too sensitive while males are just “letting out frustration” (Brown & Deikman, 2010).

In sport this issue is an important variable as it initiates many of the conversations as to how athletes must possess a physicality that is controlled by males (Cazenave, Le Scanaff & Woodman, 2007). In most cases the women who are athletic are questioned about their

sexuality, their use of illegal drugs such as steroids and often are undermined for their skills when all other tactics of negating their ability fall short. The use of emotion in sport is a determining factor to performance. Women are thought to be more emotional than males in sport (Messner, 2000), and therefore, they are often viewed as lesser in the realm of a physical combat sports such as wrestling. Messner (2003) further analyzes how emotions play a role in character and personality which contributes to sport perseverance. While women often possess a more emotional personality, preconceived notions are used against them in sport.

Environment

Where do these possible selves come from, and how can coaches assess the environment and what is a developmental need? How can coaching supplement existing culture in assisting youths to a larger sense of self confidence and possibility in their lives? These questions focus our search to further understand how identity and gender intersect in the world of wrestling and male sport. These ideas are significant variables in understanding youth development. Zhu and Tse (2014) write about the ways in which possible environments play roles in students' perception of self. Not only that, but these youths must then imagine what is possible and take action to reach their goals. If this is valid, then immersing them in an environment where young women feel empowered would yield more independent and intrinsically motivated females. Young women in general were found to have more positive interpretations of self although they often shared common feelings of not being supported (Oyserman, 2014). They also found that parents who supported sports in turn supported their student's growth and potential to reach future goals when set at higher expectations.

Gender Perceptions

Wrestling, which builds character and determination, is associated with the needed characteristics of pursuing the possible self. The ways that adolescents identify the characteristics of sport is also vital for the understanding of sport attraction (Miller, 2008). Klomsten, Marsh and Skaalvik (2005) present a study on how a youth's perception of her body is vital to her identity and perception of self. In the study, the ideal male body is described by the students using adjectives such as fit and strong, with well-defined muscles, especially on the shoulders, upper arms, chest and belly ("six pack") (Miller, 2008).

A majority of boys and girls believed that an ideal female body was associated with the characteristics of thin, slender but fit, nice "boobs," "tight butt," sexy, and pretty face. Ironically, girls value a slender appearance, good looking face, and femininity more than boys do, which falls well within the stereotyped expectations of femininity and beauty. Findings inferred that girls are more influenced by advertising, television, and magazines when it came to messages about ideal bodies (Messner, 2003; Peter & Valkenburg, 2007). This confirms that women are socialized to use their bodies to please others instead of for their active qualities. Examples such as wearing revealing uniforms in sports underlies how sexuality trumps skill. The responses were well in accordance with gender stereotyping both boys and girls considered boys tougher, more aggressive, and more equipped to tolerate pain (Evans, 2006). Girls were regarded as more graceful, coordinated, flexible, and caring. Overall, 55% of the boys did not believe that certain sports are more appropriate for a certain gender and this helped secure ideas that environments shape what is socially acceptable. Zhu and Tse targeted the ways gender differences affect ideas of self (2014). Girls have to work

harder from a younger age to gain acceptance in the social community, and to prove their worth.

Klomsten, Skaalvik, and Espnes (2004) continued to draw on the idea of self-concept and sports through an exploration on the role of physicality. The main focus of their research was to determine if physical self-concept was still apparent within each gender and if so, which gender portrayed a significantly higher amount of it. It was found that boys demonstrate higher levels of physical self-concept and self-esteem in eight subdomains. Those included Appearance, Body Fat, Sports Competence, Physical Activity, Endurance, Strength, Coordination, and Health. The authors continuously address the different ideals of feminine characteristics versus male characteristic. They categorize the ideal male as muscular, athletic and one that is taller. In contrast, the ideal female is categorized as slender and shorter than the average man. Because of this understanding, they claim that the Western world essentially states that a female and male body must fall under these characteristics in order to be labeled as a certain gender. The authors then elaborate on how the idealized image of what bodies of each gender ‘should’ look like are often presented through advertising and the media. Their research found that boys scored highest in global physical self-concept and they even scored higher than girls in the flexibility dimension.

Male Gaze

“Fear of masculinization” and the need to focus on image rather than strength in the performance of a heterosexual feminine corporeal identity is important in understanding why girls participate much less in sports in comparison to boys. Generally, girls feel pressure to construct and present their bodies in a way that is pleasing to boys and they also feel like they are being judged in the traditionally masculine domain of sports competency. They must look

feminine while excelling at sports (Lanz & Schroeder, 1999). Girls who are most confident at sports have the least objection to participating with boys. A combination of ‘fear of masculinization’ and ‘inhibited intentionality’ means that most girls do not like to be watched (by boys) while doing sports.

In a theoretical study, Evans (2006) uses both qualitative and quantitative research on adolescents aged 13-16 to examine girls’ participation rates in physical education (PE) classes. Overall, the results showed that girls ultimately feel pressured by the male gaze, and this forces them to present their bodies as passively beautiful. In addition, they also feel pressure to be competent at sport, and thus present their bodies as active. However, the idea of this happening only when boys are present was proven to be wrong, because even in single-sex PE, girls continued to present their bodies the same way– as if males were still present (Klomstein, Marshand & Skaalvik, 2005). This proved that the ‘gaze’ was internalized and therefore illustrated that complexities and contradictions are present within girls’ experiences of their bodies and sports. The main idea surrounding this article is the understanding of ‘fear of masculinization’ which is a dominant discourse that constructs corporeal femininity based on appearance and masculinity on strength/ability (Koivula, 1995; Lantz & Schroeder, 1999). Because sports focus on strength and agility, this sexuality firmly falls parallel to the masculine domain. On the other hand, femininity is associated with the physical characteristics of beauty and looking good rather than having physical ability (Evans, 2006). In the end, the deciding factor that will determine and guide teenagers, specifically girls, into enjoying PE, is education about gender identity and teaching them how to resist these pressures by demonstrating that sport transcends the masculine identity (Klomstein, Marsh & Skaalvik, 2005).

Klomsten, Skaalvik, and Espnes (2004) state that in Western societies femininity is equated with characteristics such as weak, helpless, graceful, non-athletic, emotional, and passive; the masculine stereotype is equated with characteristics such as strong, forceful, dominating, athletic, brave, and competitive. The gender stereotypes also hold that men and boys worry less about appearance than do girls and women (Plaza, Boiche, Brunel, & Richard, 2017). The results indicated significantly higher physical self-concept in boys than in girls in eight subdomains, as well as global physical self-concept and self-esteem (O'Hara, 2016). In this study, girls did not score higher than boys on the Flexibility dimension, which is considered to be a typical feminine feature. Girls in Norway seem to choose different kinds of sports to participate in than boys. There is a significant difference between girls and boys in physical power and muscle strength (favoring boys) after puberty; boys are generally more capable in endurance, strength, and sports competence. Repeated encouragement can change the trajectory of youth and their reality of possible self (Oyserman & Fryberg, 2006). The female perspective tends to avoid being physically strong, which aligns with the social norm of female inferiority. It is not socially acceptable to be strong, and since this creates an identity in young females at such a young age, it affects ideas of future self (Oyserman, 2002). When coaching a youth, the coach can see what qualities make an athlete successful. Athletes compare themselves constantly to these ideal qualities. Generally, "peers look to peers", and as such this is the time to sow the ideas of self (Hargreaves, 1986).

Sport changes thoughts of self as it allows and encourages young men and women to visualize what it is they are trying to achieve (Guest & Schneider, 2003). While they develop a work ethic, the learning of the sport enables personal and emotional growth. Oyserman (2006) stated that women may feel uncomfortable looking and being strong, again aligning

with social norms of femininity. While fighting off your back in wrestling, you are literally learning how to help yourself, and you are learning what you can become by yourself. This does not align with the implicit social messages that tell females to be dependent rather than independent.

Utilizing a feminist theoretical framework, Messner (1990) challenges the role of sports violence both socially and psychologically. In doing so, Messner seeks to identify the ideological meanings behind sports violence as a “mediated spectacle” as well as the meanings that male athletes construct around their participation in sports violence (Messner, 2003). While doing this, Messner’s purpose is to link how violence against men is related to the power relations amongst men and women. Messner argues that as social life became more “civilized”, the power began shifting towards women, and sports was used as a method to reassure not only masculinity but “male power and privilege” (Messner, 2003). Messner (2003) referred to this privilege as the “gender order” which suggests that, despite men having a superior social position over women, violent action is generally more aggressive towards men. A critical point that was made in the research is that violent behavior is learned behavior, and some men learn it better than others (Messner, 2003). This suggests the exception to the rule that anyone can be socialized to be violent, whether male or female. The research demonstrates how this behavior is often learned through coaches and even praised by coaches often in male teams where physical and vocal aggression are accepted and encouraged. In spite of this, narratives and values behind hegemonic masculinity are constantly perpetuated.

Research by Oyserman, Terry and Bybee (2002) has further examined how encouragement through incentives affect growth and motivation for possible selves. They

used the demographic information of female, low-income, and Latina ethnic backgrounds in an investigation about after-school programming. This study looked at an after school program, where students were given incentives for their participation and were challenged to see what their possible selves look like. In these studies, it was seen that informal conversations with athletes are vital to the growth and development of character and identities. Male and female perspectives play an important role on this as the two differ in character traits and desired outcome from athletic goals. The underlying idea is that incentivized goal setting is a primary factor in success.

Race and Identity

Race was also a large factor in identity development and thoughts of self. The students in Szasz's (1998) study were seen in the study to form social groups with their similar ethnic group to create comfort in environments to assist in their development. This was common among African Americans who reported less likelihood of being successful than their white male counterparts who were more sure of success and tended to be more independent, which may be a sign of privilege that is not experienced by their peers. As Oyserman points out, parents tend to be a huge influence on thoughts of self. Ultimately, the discussion of culturally sensitive future selves and possibilities of future selves are needed to be inclusive of all groups. Conversations need to be had across all races and genders (Oyserman, Terry, & Bybee, 2002).

Chapter 3: Method

Throughout the season I attended a variety of tournaments for high school girls wrestling. I sought out and identified those athletes who were to be interviewed and proceeded by administering a survey with a variety of questions concerning how athletes feel in the world of wrestling. These questions were taken from the literature review and is a follow up on the work of Oyserman and Theories of Possible Selves (Oyserman, 2006). They also utilize a quantitative approach to thematically organize feedback from the participants. The interviews were approximately 30 minutes in length and were recorded. The interviews were then typed and coded into desired variables.

Participants

The participants were 78 female high school wrestlers between the ages of 14 to 17 who were recruited from high schools in central California. The students were asked to participate in a study to explore the nature of experiences related to participating in wrestling in high school. The study was conducted during wrestling season. All participants were on the Varsity team, due to low numbers of participants, there is no Junior Varsity Team.

Procedures

Participants were recruited at the wrestling tournaments on the following dates: December 27th, 2018, and January 7th, 2019. If they are not contacted at a tournament then they were contact at their school site between the months of October 2018 to February 2019. The researcher drove to various sites to make contact with athletes. Participants were also contacted via their head coach. Students were required to return signed parental consent forms and assent forms prior to participating in the study. All interviews and surveys took place in wrestling rooms after practice and no coaches were present while they were being

completed. Since parents often attend the tournaments, I gained consent during this time when possible. A \$5 gift card was given to thank participants for their participation. All interviews were audiotaped.

Significance of Tournament Setting

The significance of the tournament setting was vital for the interpretation of the data as this was a key component in the way the students answered the questions in the survey. The females were under pressure to compete and therefore may have felt less likely to complete the survey with integrity. Therefore, to have the best chance for success at getting reliable results the athletes were briefly talked to about the process and asked to have a parent sign for permission, then were contacted at their school to avoid corrupting the data. I completed follow up phone calls with all athletes for the interview portion of the process. I sent reminders every 3 days to ensure turn around time was no more than 3 weeks.

Survey Measures

Participant characteristics. The participants also completed a brief questionnaire that included their age, ethnicity, grade level in school, and whether they received free or reduced lunch. Students also were asked to report their grades in english, math, and science.

The importance of high grades and applying to college.

The students were asked to rate on a Likert scale the extent to which academic achievement and applying to college was important to them (0 = not important to 3 = highly important).

The two items were “Apply to a 4-year University,” “Make the highest possible grades in each class;”

Recreational drug use frequency. The students were asked how often they have engaged in alcohol and marijuana use (0 = not at all to 4 = almost all of the time). Separate ratings were

obtained for alcohol and marijuana use, as well as for in-season use and off-season use.

Coach-athlete trust and openness. The students were asked to rate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with five statements that assessed the quality of their relationship with their head coach. Response options included: 0 = strongly disagree, 1= somewhat disagree, 3= somewhat agree, and 4 = strongly agree. The items were: “My coach is someone I can trust”, “My coach does not listen to me (reverse coded);” “My coach teaches me how to cope with my problems in positive ways;” “My coach is approachable outside of practice;” and “ I can talk to my coach about any personal matters.” The ratings were summed to create a coach-athlete trust and openness score.

Coach academic encouragement.

The students were asked to rate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with four statements that assessed how much academic encouragement they received from their coaches. The response options included: 0 = strongly disagree, 1= somewhat disagree, 3= somewhat agree, and 4 = strongly agree. The items were: “My coach advises me to do well in school;” “My coach advises me to do my homework regularly;” “My coach talks to me about my future goals;” and “My coach talks to me about going to college.” The ratings were summed up to create a coach academic encouragement score.

Coach substance use advice. The students were asked to rate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with the following statements: “My coach advises me to avoid drinking alcohol” and “My coach advises me to avoid using drugs.” The ratings were summed up to create a coach substance use advice score.

Open-ended interview questions.

The interview started with an open conversation about the nature of their position on

the wrestling team. Thereafter, the student-athletes were asked the following questions:

“Can you describe any life lessons or skills that you have learned from wrestling?”, *“Can you describe your relationship with your coaching staff?”*, *“How would you describe the treatment from coaches and peers?”*, *“Have you received feedback from peers? If so, what type? how does it affect your ideas of self?”* Questions about body type were also included: *“How does the uniform, a singlet, affect their self-esteem?”* *“Does male pressure exist and if so what are the results of their perception of it?”* The students were given as much time as needed to respond to the questions. Interviews lasted approximately 30 minutes each over the phone. The phone conversations were recorded by having the interview on speaker phone and audio-recorder simultaneously.

Participant Observations

Observations were taken at two major competitive female wrestling tournaments in order to observe the interactions between coaches and athletes and how the environment shaped the observed interactions. The researcher reported what was happening at the tournaments, including anecdotes of triangulation. This anecdotal reporting included but was not limited to the action occurring, what coaches said occurred, what each wrestler did and what both the coach and the wrestler said they did. The goal was to obtain more information concerning the messages male coaches delivered to their athletes. Coaches have a position of authority where they can shift the way males become masculinized and how women see their femininity/masculinity in a male dominated sport that definitively caters to strength.

Qualitative data analyses: All audiotaped interviews were transcribed. A content analysis was applied to uncover patterns in the text related to the frequency of occurrence of particular themes (Auer-Srnka & Koeszegi, 2007; Krippendorff, 2013). “Thought units” were

used as the basis for coding and analysis. These units comprised one idea communicated regardless of whether it was expressed in one sentence or more. Several research assistants worked together to come up with a category scheme from five transcripts which we were then applied to the remaining transcripts. The research assistants coded the transcripts independently for agreement. We visited and discussed any discrepancies throughout the process.

The Site

To collect the data I had to travel to several different high schools. C High School, L High School, A High School, SP High School, N High School and R High School, and AG High school, all of which are located in California. These schools were given code names to keep their identity private (see Table 1). At the tournaments I was able to meet many athletes from several schools and it allowed me to start the conversation. As planned, I collected data at high school practice at school sites between the months of November two thousand eighteen to January two thousand nineteen. These sites were picked based on scheduling and ability to find athletes with parents available for collection of consent.

Table 1

School Demographic Information

School Name	Student Population	Wrestling team size (boys to girls)	Years of established programming (for girls)
N high School	964	35:17	15
AG High school	2,118	40:1	2
SP High School	1,534	25:20	15
A High School	1,328	35:3	0
L High School	1,502	35:13	1
SY High School	933	13:2	0
C High School	2,331	17:15	1
MB High School	821	18:15	2

Chapter 4: Results

This chapter presents the results of the research questions asked in the initial portion of this paper. First, I will be presenting the similarities across the interviews in terms of the key codes we sought out using qualitative and contextual understanding. There were several prevalent themes that emerged from all of the interviews that divulged significant information regarding the athletes feeling toward the sport and concerning thoughts of self. These excerpts were significant because they reiterate the theoretical frameworks of Messner and Oyserman. These concepts were the most prevalent in the interview portion of the process and essentially identified key components that are missing from current research. These concepts will guide understanding of how to approach working with female youth in male sports in future context for coaches and administrators.

The themes that emerged from the coding were Lack of Female Space, Violence, Body Image, Sexuality, and Gender Validation. Overall, there were a total of 125 excerpts from 40 participants mentioned lack of female space, 94 excerpts from 36 participants that discussed violence, 72 excerpts from 25 participants that mentioned body image, 138 excerpts from 39 participants that mentioned sexuality, there were 193 excerpts from 43 participants discussing gender validation. Below are examples of what the girls described and how it correlates to a deeper understanding of how oppression affects not only the current identity of our athletes but what they see themselves as possible being in the future.

Identified Female Space

As one of the main components in a wrestling room, physical space is essential to be able to perform in the most successful manner. Along with this one also has to be able to

understand how mental and emotional space also play a role in the feelings of acceptance and belonging our athletes feel, both male and female. This is incredibly important as environment is proven to shape thoughts of self (Oyserman, 2012). What came as a surprise in my observation data, was that it revealed a now positive and inviting space for females, but only on the surface. Underneath the surface observations, there was still a prominent sense of male superiority and dominance in the space. Thus, although this seemed to be an inviting environment for female success, males still organized, controlled and made all major decisions concerning the event. For example, my field notes state,

The gym was filled to the brim with folks cheering on their sisters, daughters, girlfriends, friends, nieces, granddaughters.... So many people came to support the female in her journey to compete for the title of best in the region, then the best in the state. These young ladies have worked for years for the opportunity to compete against other females, finally made official in 2018/2019 by CIF, to show what they could do. Wrestling has historically been a male sport where women have not been accepted or taken seriously by coaches and spectators alike. January, 2019.

The coach looked intently at the match in progress and calculated the next move the female athlete should take. Not having listened to any of the coaching from the sideline, his anger began to grow and out of anger, he started a rant of anti-semitic phrases. He was soon removed from the gymnasium for inappropriate conduct.

These aforementioned observations demonstrated how CIF is attempting to create an environment that boasts equal rights for all, however the underlying causes of the inequity are still in the places of power. Their dominance controls the space, often this is positive but when it is not it is detrimental for the athletes.

Based on my observations, when identifying space, I am referring to it in a multi-dimensional context. Women must feel a physical space of acceptance, which creates a safe emotional space and this is inextricably connected to a sense of belonging. Therefore if the females do not have an emotional space as well as a physical space, the outcomes are not certain. This past year, CIF set up a solely female space for competition, and that alone

shifted the paradigm slightly, towards one of perceived equality. However, as reported by the athletes in the study, the data tells a different story.

The study reported a total of 125 excerpts from 40 different participants (73%) where the young women felt like they did not have an adequate female space. There were three different ways that female space was categorized: The first was positive feelings of acceptance in the male space (6 out of 78, 7%), followed by limited access to space such as weight rooms and schedules (21 out of 63, 33%), and lastly, a lack of body space and respect where the females felt “pushed out” by their peers (34 out of 63, 53%). With regards to positive feelings of acceptance in male space, two students mentioned in their interviews their positive experience. They stated,

It’s nice to be able to know that being a female and still being able to have that opportunity to participate in the male dominated sport... and being accepted by my team and my coaches...is good in a sense that no one really tried to shut me out or push me down... and they’re all really supportive so that’s always helpful for my self-confidence. (AGHS001)

I think in this generation the gap is kind of closing because they have our own--I think the gap between women and men sports is kind of closing we are kind of more equally—we have our—girls have their own wrestling teams and we can just do all the sports guys can do (NHS014)

The finding that 7% of the girls in the study reported positive feelings around acceptance contradict Messner’s (2006) work on women in male sports which talk about how they often were neglected and given inequitable treatment. However, in alignment with most literature (Messner, YEAR; Walton, YEAR) most interviewees reported negative space which translated as lack of access to amenities, encouragement from coaches and male teammates, or lack of basic equal treatment. For example, one athlete discussed the lack of access to amenities. She mentioned,

We don't get ... the football players they get their workouts in the gym but we don't really go to the gym as often I would like to but the football guys are either on the field or in the gym or in the gym lifting weights and I kinda want to do that to but we—I can't really do that as much. (AHS002)

Even basic necessities such as practice times and practice space, in accordance with the time needed to adequately learn and practice the sport. For examples, the following girls said,

Our practices are from 5:30 to 7:30 so it's a lot later because the boys have practices first and then we have practice so there's really not enough time to work out. (MBHS005)

I don't know it's like I don't really consider myself a part of this team.. As much. Like I do when I go to JV tournaments with them but I'm kinda like focused on myself. Like it is not for them. (AHS002)

You get more praise for being athletes and more time to work out more facilities, they're locker room is a lot better than the female locker room. (SPHS010)

While others discussed the tension felt between the male and female athletes in regards to practice, restrictions placed on their interactions on the mat, and overall treatment. For example,

Well I know for sure there is a lot of well there's not really a lot of tension but like we don't really get along with us cause I really don't know why but we just don't get along so well... every time we have to practice with the guys were neither of us like it yeah like we just I don't really get along. (SPHS006)

SP got their girls wrestling program from I think it was a [co-op organization] that required a female sport for every male sport... I guess they got their girls wrestling team because the guys had one but they have a bunch of restrictions like you can't wrestle with the boys we can't do a lot of things with the boys (SPHS017)

If it's put up against the situation of a football player and a female yes the males will most likely be treated more highly than the female. (SPHS011)

An equal treatment that has been an issue I feel like...guys get more of their supplies quicker than girls...cause we had an issue where we were getting our new singlets and I was barely joining and the girls were saying when are we going to get our singlets

why did the guys get them first...so I thought that was a problem that guys always get their stuff first than girls (LHS016)

When it comes to encouragement from teammates, many reported there was not much cooperation between male and female teams,

When we go to tournaments and they kind of ask us a lot what we placed or how well we did and they kind of don't really encourage us they kind of put us down a little bit more and I really don't like that so I feel like we should just--I don't know they should be more welcoming about it or...cheer us on more. (NHS006)

Lastly, the girls talked about the lack of physical space and respect. One interviewee revealed that the language and pressure among peers is also an issue when asked if she felt comfortable in the space with the males, she responded,

I mean sometimes when a girl is on their period and everything and guys know then they're obviously gonna purposefully be like {mocking sounds} talking crap and everything but other than that no. (NHS011)

Two girls even talked about how they often felt invisible. They mentioned,

The girls no one really pays attention to it like its mainly the guys like for example for football they mainly pay attention to them in the fall season while there is other sport like volleyball tennis that no one really pays attention to. (SPHS001)

I would practice with the guys...they're a little bit more cocky and if we said something they would kind of just look past it or think that you know we weren't--we didn't know what we were saying or...I know my coaches have said that that sometimes there's situations where the refs won't even...hear what they're saying so they have to get a male coach to talk to them. (NHS003)

Even when the girls weren't being ignored, they often felt like the expectations for them were much different than for the boys. For example, one girl said,

Females are treated differently...they're like...we get less things from the guys the guys they are pushed harder...they're told you have to do harder stop giving up and girls they tell us the same thing so it's weird they give us a different tone they tell us softly and they tell the guys all harsh. (LHS016)

Similarly, respect was a common issue as a missing link among teammates of opposite gender,

Well I don't know... like I say the most respected like girls are and it like a male sport would be like MMA. But that's like you don't really get respected until you're older and actually fighting and stuff and right now there's not that many girls.. so you're not around the environment as much so they don't really take us as seriously. (AHS002)

I would practice with the guys...they're a little bit more cocky and if we said something they would kind of just look past it or think that you know we weren't--we didn't know what we were saying or...I know my coaches have said that sometimes there's situations where the refs won't even...hear what they're saying so they have to get a male coach to talk to them. (NHS003)

Some athletes reported feeling physically uncomfortable with a male in the sport as it

such a physical sport,

I would want a female wrestling coach because I feel like I'll be more comfortable...I'll be more comfortable if it's the same gender because I feel like girls get uncomfortable if a male is touching them because sometimes you have to touch them in some places that shouldn't be touched and I feel like a female has that...has permission to and it's more comfortable to talk to a female than a male. (LHS016)

I feel like they are cared about differently. (NHS002)

Violence

The research states that women in general found this sport to be a violent one where women are either oversexualized or used as sexual objects in the case of professional wrestling. In the case of mixed martial arts, some research states that females thought it was too violent and did not want to see women in the brutal physical way they saw men on the television shows. The ideal woman research states, is not a brutal violent, being, rather they are meant to be fragile and feminine. In my study I have found that they are more likely to see their strength than females of the past studies, These athletes are seeing themselves and their peers as strong and independent women who are capable of whatever they decide to do, in the sport and in life. These females were overall much more aware of self, and much more aware of the ways that others may perceive them but without being cognizant of why they thought that way.

The overall data reported 21 out of 68 interviewees (30%) discussed violence and the sport, totaling 78 excerpts with code words violence. The two variables, violence and lack of female space were cross examined to expose that 63 of the total 78 (80%) excerpts coincided with each other and mentioned both in the same responses and context. Violence occurred 5 times when cross-examined with positive body image, and it occurred 10 times when cross examined with negative body image, violence was coded 16 times in co-occurrence with gender validation, violence and lack of female space occurred 6 times and sexuality and violence co-occurred 14 times

Messner (2002) describes the masculine identity in sport and how the women in the male role counteracts that norms of society. As the structure exists women are not meant to be violent in the world of male dominance, and when they emulate non-effeminate roles the social construct of masculinity is put into question. Two main themes surfaced from the interviews under violence which were perceived masculinity and seeing the sport not for the violence, but for the strength. Several athletes reported that others see them as violent, or angry since they have joined the sport. 18 (23%) of the interviewees reported feelings of judgement based on what others feel about the violence in wrestling. The girls talk about how the perceptions of a masculine identity from others often had a negative connotation.

For example, they stated,

When girls are talking like bad mouthing you and you want to show them what you can do it's just like your empowerment that you are stronger than them and better than them so like other people can be talking crap about you but like in your mind you don't care because you are doing something that can hurt them but you really can't hurt them. (SPHS001)

I think people used to see me as strong but now they see me as stronger and as someone not to mess with, I guess. Well that's the complete opposite of how I am I think people just think that like I will be able to beat them up if I wanted to but that's not how I am, if that makes sense. (NHS015)

If I tell a friend or something oh yeah I do wrestling they'll automatically think I'm just this really strong mean human being and I'm really not I'm really nice I swear but people I guess think of me as being mean and that I just want to fight everyone but I don't I really don't and yeah it just makes me seem for other people it makes me seem like a meaner person. (SPHS006)

Some of the interviewees reported mixed feelings toward the sport. Ten (7.8%) of the interviewees reported an understanding that wrestling is violent and is seen as such. Three girls mentioned:

No I still believe it's a rough sport yes you will get injured and you will get sore and bruised but overall it's very fun. (LHS016)

I had one kid that we were—we were in a judo tournament and I had him in a pin and he had these big long legs that kind of came over my head and hooked my head and I popped it off so when I popped it off I kind of hit my nose and my nose started bleeding no big deal but he refused to come back into the match like he was like he was horrified that he'd given me a bloody nose... and for me I'm like no we're going to finish this match come on I had you pinned you're not going to forfeit now. (SYHSC001)

When I first saw the people wrestle I'm like oh they're stabbing each other and it's really physical but me doing it... I had to I'm thinking that's moves and people don't usually get hurt if somebody does it wrong and it's all about technique. (SPHS007)

Yet, violence was also seen as a source of strength to prevent the girls from experiencing dating violence. For example,

I've seen and heard from some of the girls that they're doing it to protect themselves from like boyfriends, so it's like at least they're realizing there's something that can help them, and they don't have to be scared of it kind of thing. (LHSC001)

Body Image

Coding captured both positive and negative expressions of body image. There were a total of 72 excerpts from 25 participants that mentioned body image in either a positive or negative way. Positive body image co-occurred with gender validation 7 times, and with sexuality in 15 times. When girls were talking about the positive aspects of wrestling and

how they saw themselves, many reported feeling a sense of confidence or emerging confidence in regards to the vulnerability of showcasing their weight and body size. For example, four girls mentioned,

I think wrestling has helped me gain self-confidence because you're putting your— like I said you're putting your weight on your arms and everyone is going to know how much you weigh no matter what so you're putting yourself out there physically because you have to be comfortable with yourself in order to be able to go on the mat and wrestle. (SPHS011)

Wrestling helped me a lot because I would never want to know my weight and I always felt that knowing my weight was like a bad thing but now in wrestling it's good to be a heavy weight or its good to be lightweight yeah. (MBHS007)

I do want to lose weight but I do feel healthy you know...I guess before I liked the way I looked before but I'm still happy with myself and healthy and I just feel good about myself because of wrestling and that's what I love about the sport so much it just helps me build up my confidence no matter how I look or what I look like you know. (NHS007).

Well like self-confidence... It hasn't really helped me gain any but it does make me feel like I'm strong and I'm building muscle and I'm not getting weak but other than that I don't really wear clothes that would you know show my body so I'm not really confident about my body yet but I'm working up to it. (CHS006)

Others specifically talked about how the uniform, the singlet, helped them to feel confident because it shows off their body and highlights the changes they have made. Once girl expressed,

The uniform kind of shows how much I have changed so it really makes me feel confident about my body because it shows how much I've been losing weight and it makes me feel good. (CHS001)

Another girl, in reference to the singlet, explained that even though the uniform is extremely form fitting, it didn't matter because the focus and love for wrestling superseded the vulnerability in the singlet. She said,

The singlet is very fitted [laughs] as I'm sure you know. It doesn't really bother me because once it gets into the point where I'm in it and we're getting ready to do the

match, all I'm thinking about is the match and how I'm going to perform in it that I don't really worry about what my body looks like. (AGHS001)

Negative body image was also a prevailing occurrence. Negative body image co-occurred with sexuality in 10 different participants.

It affects how I feel about my body because a singlet is more... tight on my body so it's like.... if you have I don't know if it's just like if you have a stomach roll you'll be able to see through the singlet unlike in other sports where you get to wear a t-shirt or a jersey or something a singlet is more tight and it just shows more even if you're not physically seeing the skin it just shows more details. (SPHS011)

I feel like sometimes especially some of my teammates they get a little worked up when they see a girl who looks thin but still muscular and like the perfect athlete and then she looks at herself and she's like wait I don't look like her she's going to kick my but (MBHS005)

There were reports of athletes having to strip to their undergarments in the gymnasium for a skin check which is a deep rooted issue in the sport. Male dominance and expectation are spilling over into the female world and this serves as an example that made these female athletes feel inappropriate and there was no space for them to be able to change nor were they offered another time or alternative to what occurred.

Sexuality

This set of data points was the second most frequently occurring, 24 out of 69 times among the participants. The participants were very aware of the way that their bodies are seen in media and it was brought up that the singlet affects how some of the athletes saw themselves. The reviews were mixed as the responses varied from a feeling of shame to feeling of empowerment through the uniform and how it defined their bodies. What was lacking in all responses was the conversation being had between the coach and the athlete about how body appearance might affect outcomes. This was common, most likely due to the

high amount of male coaches present and the level of comfortability felt between the athlete and their male authority figures that this is the issue.

Sexuality was identified as any sexual comment concerning the female's body, how they are treated or feel due to their sexuality and if the participants felt that female wrestlers are over sexualized in the sport. Sexuality and body image co-occurred 25 times among the participants, 15 times with positive body image, 20 times with gender validation, 10 times with lack of female space, 14 times with violence and 10 times with negative body image. Girls mentioned others perceptions of the sexual identity of wrestlers, their observations of their teammates, and the normalization of lesbian or bisexual relationships. For example,

I respect the decisions of everybody else... I see yeah the relationships between everybody on the team because I know some people do say that oh how like half the girls on the wrestling team are bisexual or they are like blah blah but that's not true and it makes me think like these girls like everybody else probably says that about me and I'm like I'm actually straight and you know everybody has their own ideas it makes me kind of not angry but oh you shouldn't be judging you know. (SPHS017)

Well I know a lot of girls on the team are kind of bi or lesbian and stuff and it just it kind of really I don't know before I used to be oh that's kind of weird but now it's a normal thing for me to see people like that so it's just kind of like made me change the way I saw things if that makes sense. (SPHS006)

It made me realize that--- if you are...let's say lesbian it doesn't really matter if you are wrestling a girl and you're lesbian because its wrestling so you don't really think about all that you know sexual stuff and everything and also... I do know a few girls who are bisexual or lesbian and... they said that it doesn't really matter that they're wrestling other girls so I think that it's good that it doesn't really make them uncomfortable or anything. (NHS011)

Girls also talked about how they experience over-sexualization on the mat from onlookers.

I mean if people are only there to see how the girls how they look then they really shouldn't be there but I think that people should really pay attention to their moves and what they can do in the match. (SPHS001)

There was also discussion about how wrestling helped redefine how girls idealizes body time and sexuality. The following two girls stated,

I noticed not a lot of girls have a perfect body so I realized you know what I don't need a perfect body to feel beautiful or anything. (SPHS006)

We wear compression shirts and compression shorts but when I was in middle school all we had were boys' singlets and I'm a little bit how do I explain this is that the word—I have slightly larger breasts than the average thirteen year old girl and so I used to get really really uncomfortable wearing that and I kind of got over it but they were boys' singlets. (MBHS005)

Gender Validation

Gender Validation was a large piece as it was a common co-occurrence with several variables. Like Oyserman (2011) argues that our environment shapes the way that adolescents' shape their identity, we can see how the wrestling environment plays a role in girls' gender identity development. These participants revealed that they are often confronted with disbelief, lack of understanding and utter sexism when it comes to their performance on the mat. Gender validation was coded 193 times from 48 participant sources. The code of gender validation occurred 29 times when cross referenced with lack of female space. The codes gender validation and sexuality occurred 20 times when cross examined. The participants reported having similar experiences with feedback from others regarding their gender and the sport. The responses in gender validation were categorized into three sections, female lack of ability, and possible future selves.

Lack of Relatability

I would want a female wrestling coach because I feel like I'll be more comfortable...I'll be more comfortable if it's the same gender because I feel like girls get uncomfortable if a male is touching them because sometimes you have to touch them in some places that shouldn't be touched and I feel like a female has that...has permission to and it's more comfortable to talk to a female than a male (LHS016)

Female Lack of Ability

When somebody tells me that I... I correct them because I don't think that it's—I don't think that it should be I am strong for a girl I think it should like—I think what they think is they think of the stereotypical girl with skirts and dresses and their nails done and I usually don't read too much into it I just correct them and I say I am stronger—I am strong for a stereotypical girl because that's what they are thinking in their head. (SPHS011)

I want to...show them that I can do certain things and it's not like "oh you can't do that" its like yeah I can watch me. (NHS013)

We watch their matches and they will come watch ours and you know we are going back and forth "I'm better than you, you are better than—like trying to see who's actually better" but in reality everybody is pretty good. (NHS013)

I feel like that's ... really important to feel it yourself rather than hear it from somebody else you don't need a guy to tell you that you are strong—you know that you are strong. (SPHS017)

I feel like women are equally as men they can do whatever they put their mind to and sometimes I feel like they underestimate girls or women but they shouldn't you know. (SPHS012)

I mean when they—when my family say like I'm strong like a girl I could be strong and a guy. I can be stronger than a guy and like when they would say that I think I would be very proud of myself for being able to be considered as strong as a girl. (SPHS001)

Well like when the boys actually wrestle stuff and me... it's like we're more accepted. If they actually take us seriously but when they don't take us seriously and just go easy and then it's just annoying then it makes me mad (AHS002)

Usually when people—when guys—men—males have said that in the past it's kind of--its kind of ... strong for a girl it's—not like the best compliment I don't--I try thinking just say your strong but I feel that-- I don't really like for a—like that whole part for a girl. (NHS014)

I used to hear a lot of that but now I feel people are more sensitive toward that in wording I usually get you're really strong for someone who is literally like 5-foot-tall I usually get it towards my height which is I get a lot of that but it's not really so much as oh you're really strong for a girl and if it is. (MBHS005)

I guess I have in elementary school I was always known as the tough one because I always did martial arts and I guess they would always be like "oh don't mess with her" or like I've heard some you know sexist things before about like "oh but your just a girl that nots-not as much as what a guy can do," I've witnessed it on like social media to like how you know women are sometimes put down on because they're

women and they can't.. People think they can't do as much or what they do is you know is cool but you know you're still a girl. (NHS016)

at first when I was in high school I never heard of a girls wrestling because they wouldn't tell the school about it...I only heard about it when I was junior year(LHS016)

Gendered Future Selves

Not all guys—but some of the guys seem—they think like “oh girls can't really go that far you know there's not really Olympic teams for girls” and stuff like that like there's more for guys so they kinda like...just cause we are girls they kinda say shit sometimes so that's kind sucks...us girls have to show them what's up and show that we are capable of it. (NHS012)

Of course a female just won an Olympic Gold Medal in wrestling like you who was it I think it was Helen Maroulis and of course we fit in I feel how do you say a girl can do anything a guy can that's true... some girls are even better than guys. (SPHS017)

the sport is that it doesn't matter... your body or whatever it doesn't matter you just need to be yourself and push through and no one judging you're just judging yourself and then from my coach is that if I want something I can't let failure keep me down I have to let it help me succeed (LHS003)

The gender validation component was a dominant factor in many of the athletes interviews.

Gender Validation and Lack of Female Space

There were 193 total excerpts recorded involving gender validation and thoughts of self. As Oysermans points out, the environment can have a very strong influence on the identity we see for our possible selves. A small amount of the participants reported they had positive experiences with their male coaches and this affected their feelings of validation.

I feel like that's ... really important to feel it yourself rather than hear it from somebody else you don't need a guy to tell you that you are strong—you know that you are strong. (SPHS017)

What changed my point of view is... at first I didn't really think it was that uncommon or wasn't that unheard of or anything but what kind of changed that was a lot of the older generation people telling me oh well I mean I would never do that if I had the choice you know getting thrown just isn't my thing or a lot of men saying it

was only guys that wrestled in their high school and everything and also a lot of people congratulating us for doing wrestling since it is such an intense sport and so I didn't actually realize how separated it was until just recently in these past few years and so that kind of changed my perspective—yeah this is cool... we are doing wrestling and this isn't something—common you know (NHS011)

The interviewees emulated ideas such as this where they expressed awareness of the environment and how it is primarily male thought; yet they were completely comfortable reporting that they had agency in their thoughts and did not need male validation.

I want to...show them that I can do certain things and it's not like “oh you can't do that” its like yeah I can watch me. (NHS 013)

When somebody tells me that I... I correct them because I don't think that it's—I don't think that it should be I am strong for a girl I think it should like—I think what they think is they think of the stereotypical girl with skirts and dresses and their nails done and I usually don't read too much into it I just correct them and I say I am stronger—I am strong for a stereotypical girl because that's what they are thinking in their head. (SPHS011)

These were two of the most common co-existing data points as 29/63 (46%) of the interviewees reported feeling they had incidences of gender invalidation and also a feeling of lack of female space. One interviewee reported,

Not all guys—but some of the guys seem—they think like “oh girls can't really go that far you know there's not really Olympic teams for girls” and stuff like that like there's more for guys so they kinda like...just cause we are girls they kinda say shit sometimes so that's kind sucks...us girls have to show them what's up and show that we are capable of it (NHS 012).

Other participants reported how they have to constantly and consistently fight for their spot on the mat. The interviewees were predisposed to male hierarchies where they had no place to speak up, they were held to one small corner of the mat, or were even put on display in front of male teammates to serve as the example. These habitual practices are detrimental to the successful development of the athletes, and create a clear male pressure among the team, and especially against the females. The following example serves as one of these reported

experiences where the females felt they were being judged based on gender bias. The interviewer asked...

Do you believe that male pressure exists? And do you feel male pressure from your coaches or your male teammates?" The response was as follows: "I feel like there definitely is the male pressure just in general since we don't have any male coaches or teammates none of that but kind of just like prove yourself constantly like even male referees that like ref male matches you kind of have to prove that you are equal or better than the boys wrestling or boys male dominated sports in general. So I can see where the male pressure for that is because you don't want to make yourself seem less than in a male sport. (NHS 015).

This was a mature response from an athlete who has already seen the disadvantage that women are faced with not only from teammates, but also coaches and even from the officials. This is a systematic injustice of inequitable practices, and a violation of Title IX compliance.

The systematic push out of these female athletes is a common occurrence in the spaces I visited throughout my studies. Some of the participants reported not feeling welcome, displayed feelings of inadequacy and also demonstrated a clear understanding that the females are being discriminated against.

I feel like especially soccer because soccer is such a popular sport I feel like the guys get a lot more how you call it like attention or a lot more of like yeah the public attention like they'll be in the newspaper all the time like and then the girls it's like once in a while—you know the guys I think they have got a new locker room and there's like a huge fight about how the girls should get a new locker room if the boys are getting one too and then I don't know if that ever happened but yeah I haven't been into the girls locker room yet but yeah you know they definitely put more—more money into guy sports especially things like football and basketball, soccer. (SPHS017)

This is a policy violation and needs to be addressed as female athletes must have the same amenities as their male counterparts in the same sport.

Coaching Demographics

This following section analyzes the interviews with the coaches. The exploration of athletes also lends itself to an exploration of the coaches and those who influence these young ladies. I was able to interview 7 coaches from the schools I worked with and from that there came a great depth and understanding of female interest and need in the sport. The coaches were asked a series of questions about their perspective regarding females in wrestling as well as their own experiences in the sport. Some of the questions asked of the coaches were:

1. How have you seen the sport develop throughout your career?
2. What do you see as the greatest advantage of having females in wrestling?
3. What would you say is the greatest progression that has affected females in the last five years?
4. How do you see this affecting females versus your male athletes?
5. Given the physical strength needed for this sport, how do you feel female athletes place in the hierarchy?

There were two main themes which arose from the conversations, how the messages learned in wrestling transfer to the real world scenarios (Transference) the athletes may encounter and how women's wrestling has created a positive change (Positive Additions to the Sport) in the women and the sport.

Transference

Transference from mat to real world was a dominant theme in the interviews and revealed that these young women are being empowered in many ways. The coaches reported

they saw mental growth, confidence gained, leadership skills developed as well as overall positive self-esteem. One coach responded,

Well I feel like in general girls realize how much they're capable of on the mat and this is the type of environment that kind of demands everything from you and so you learn how to dig deep and how to push through times that you didn't think were possible and you really learn your limitations and that they're far greater than you would've ever thought. (MBC001).

In regard to confidence and ability, one coach responded,

Yeah, they are able to do things a lot longer you know because it teaches them patience and it makes them a lot more confident to need to see that. This is really new so if a situation comes up they are more confident they're not as passive and timid as a lot of girls. (NHSC001).

Often, females did not participate because of the opinions of others,

I think it's a huge a huge resource I saw a lot of friends that liked—liked judo or liked wrestling but ended up kind of backing out of it because it wasn't it wasn't feminine enough it wasn't girly enough their boyfriends didn't like it this or that you know that I think with additional support they probably would have stuck it out cause ultimately they loved it (SYHSC001)

Athlete Perceptions of their Coaches

As the researcher, I also found that generational differences existed among the male coaches and their perspective on females ability in this realm. One student responded when asked about her coaches point of view,

Okay so as an athlete do you feel supported by all the coaches?" in response, "Yes definitely since ... I definitely feel supported by the one specific guy coach because he thinks—he is an actual—he's actually one older men have--hasn't seen girls wrestling until recently and he thinks it's like super cool and he's always telling us to keep pushing and keep doing it you know this isn't and extreme sport but if you wanna do you have to push and everything and of course our regular coach tells us all these things but I think it's a bit ... a bit cooler hearing an older generation male telling us these things just because you don't really hear that often from those types of people" (NHS011)

This was included to demonstrate the power of the perspective of coaches, and how athletes can

clearly see their point of view, through actions, words etc. Another interviewee reported:

“we can do anything and like we can be anything, we can do anything just like everybody else which gives us like a little empowerment to because like if boys can do it, we can do it in like boys wrestling and our wrestling we have posters up for like us. There is a poster up for the boys and there is a poster for the girls, it just feels that we can obviously do wrestling that we can do anything to like the boys can do” (SPHS005).

The expressions of equity this young athlete explained from her, was all her coaches doing. To create a culture where your athletes feel this way should be the goal of a coach. The underlying theme from these coaches feedback was they do believe that females have earned and deserve and equal space on the mat. There are limitations to this as they already have some good intentions regarding females in wrestling or they may have not wanted to be interviewed for this study. The fact that these young ladies can see the acceptance in their coach who is changing his own perspective about this topic, is a powerful moment. Not until we can shift the paradigm of women’s abilities will all athletes see the same equality this athlete feels on her team.

Positive Additions to the Sport

When responding to the sentiment of women being a benefit to the sport or an obstacle (coded as Champion or challenger of competition change), these were the coaches responses to how they felt about women in the sport,

I think it has, I think they’ve benefited the girls being able to... I think getting more girls getting involved in it because of that because the fact that they're not... there's now a days what the word im looking for... I think a lot of girls weren't getting involved in it before because they were having to go out and wrestle against boys and/or being on the same team as boys as far as you know as innocent wrestling you have to wrestle other group of boys but I think it's benefit of them having.. Match of girls wrestling tournaments and girls wrestling... championships stuff like this definitely benefiting the girls... to insure that they – to help them more (0:07:36.7?) to get involved with it. (AHSC001).

It is positive because it definitely like girls are a lot more like they like that connection in like and it's like connecting with other girls that do the same thing they like it a lot...(NHSC001).

I think so because there is a lot of girls who would wrestle guys and you know they wouldn't get matched even. Wrestling girls they get matched and they get more mat time... They can wrestle girls and actually know where they are at level wise..." (NHSC002).

Yeah I think it's always been—I think it's better for the sport... I think for both sexes cause I've been on both sides I've seen—I've been to where I've seen girls get destroyed by boys and I've seen girls destroy boys and I think it's just more of a I think society—our society still has to kind of get caught up to realize that girls can do what boys can do because I've seen you know parents and fathers get very upset with their sons when they lose to girls but I think it's also better that the girls have opportunities now where they can wrestle girls instead of us back in the day having to drive you know for some of our first wrestlers we had—we had to drive up north in Central California and they would—the only competition they would have were boys' tournaments and so we had to put them in the boys' tournaments and we had a girl who was a four time state champion and she would beat every boy at a one hundred and sixty pounds or more and she was amazing but you know there was—it was hard for us to find a girl cause back then there was only a handful around our area and the central coast as well. (SPHSC001).

Overall, these coaches really encouraged these young women in the sport where males have been dominant for so long. The points they bring up as to what females can offer to the sport are invaluable as they are the first hand reporters of this experience.

Research Question #2: What are the repercussions and obstacles faced by female athletes who participate at schools who are not in Compliance of Title IX?

Female athletes are not blind to the inequitable treatment that is given to them on their campuses. One athlete reported how aware she was of the lack of resources provided to them.

No actually I feel like it should—I feel like they just there is not enough attention going to that aspect of our like our equal—like sports like I feel like a lot of even the

coaches I mean not the coaches but like the administration ignores a lot of that stuff—like especially the what do you call it the athletic director and all that stuff they should put more attention into that more. (SPHS017)

I think it's also better that the girls have opportunities now where they can wrestle girls instead of us back in the day having to drive you know for some of our first wrestlers we had—we had to drive up north in Central California and they would—the only competition they would have were boys' tournaments and so we had to put them in the boys' tournaments and we had a girl who was a four time state champion and she would beat every boy at a one hundred and sixty pounds or more and she was amazing but you know there was—it was hard for us to find a girl cause back then there was only a handful around our area and the central coast as well (SPHSC001)

Several of the schools visited throughout this process, who also declined to comment, were not in compliance with title IX. This is occurring through lack of female practice space, and lack of scheduling competition. It was stated by interviewees that their coaches failed to schedule events for female athletes, in some situations the athlete was asked to schedule their own competition, then were not made concrete. The coaches and athletic directors who supervise these athletic endeavors were shown to have limited understanding or knowledge of female interest in the sport, or simply claimed negligence when it came to accusatory statements. This inequality is clear when these teams are looked at purely as numbers, as seen above. Some schools had a large number of female athletes even if they did not have their own team. For example, larger school populations generally had larger team populations with larger female members. However AG has upwards of 40 members with only 1 female member. The variables that fed into why this dynamic has been created was a factor of the triangulation I discussed with coaches during their interviews processes as well.

Sports and Academic Success

Research states that sports and academic success go hand in hand. I found this to be similarly true in wrestling. The obstacles that stand in the way of female athletes however is that most

coaches do not support females in male spaces and therefore the search for colleges for their female athletes is almost non-existent. The athletes reported the coaches often had no schedules for them for competition, they also reported that when asked about competition they were told to find their own schedules. Their parents were also asked to drive and coach these tournaments. This is in direct violation of title IX.

Table 2.

Dedoose Code Co-occurrence

	Body Image	Positive Body Image	Gender Validation / invalidation	Lack of Female Space	Sexuality / Body Appearance	Violence / Physicality	Negative Body Image	Totals
Body Image	0	4	7	1	24	2	1	39
Positive Body Image	4	0	7	1	15	5	0	33
Gender Validation / invalidation	7	7	0	29	20	15	3	82
Lack of Female Space	1	1	29	0	10	7	1	49
Sexuality / Body Appearance	24	15	20	10	0	14	10	93
Violence / Physicality	2	5	15	7	14	0	0	43
Negative Body Image	1	0	3	1	10	0	0	15
Totals	39	33	82	49	93	43	15	300

After much exploration of the literature and athletes currently in the sport there were key ideas and themes that drove the conversation. As society begins to explore this idea of “strong is beautiful” women will begin to have more opportunities to be seen for what they are capable of versus what they appear as. Research discusses the differences in variables that contribute to identity development, one of these is the coach athlete relationship. These are extremely powerful relationships, “...the data illustrate how the creation of strong athletic identity led to a vulnerable sense of self, which, when disrupted, critically contributed to the development of an eating disorder. They also indicate how the prevailing discourse fed the disorder through ongoing surveillance and disciplining of the self” (Jones, 2005). In this situation the coach was a variable in this athlete's ultimate downfall as they developed an eating disorder which could have been shifted perhaps if the coach was more involved positively and had the athlete's safety as the main concern. In wrestling this topic of weight loss, or “cutting weight” comes up frequently and it is the coaches responsibility to ensure that all of their athletes are performing in the safest manner possible. From various interviews and surveys there were some prevalent ways that coaches can reach out to their athletes to help build rapport and build a relationship of trust where they can be successful in a healthy manner.

Research states that role modeling of coaches to athletes is a vital way to increase positive identity development. In sports this role of authority figures possesses the same significance. Male coaches can shift the way males become masculinized and how women see their femininity/masculinity. The actions of the authority figures are pivotal in the performance and self-esteem as well as identity development of the youth. The ability and

influence the coach has is key to developing a responsible and confident young athlete. When asked how the mentorship played a role, one coach responded,

Yeah, it does, I always use obviously the quote from the End Game ‘once you wrestled everything in life is easy’ you know when we have our banquet we always talk about that and then for example a number of our wrestlers that are alumni that come back and visit we have three of them come visit this last week because they were home from college and we’re always open doors we’re always encouraging them to come and talk to them and tell them about hey man I’m able to do this I’m able to do that and wrestlers who got scholarships come back and talk to the girls and tell them hey you know there is opportunities out there if you want to continue with the sport and look at the door that’s opening for me so we do our best to encourage them to use the skills and stuff they learn in wrestling to get beyond—I always tell them too I always tell them hey you didn’t listen you missed this what are you going to do in life if it’s your kid what are you going to do in life when you get in a car accident I always relate it to life you can’t sit there and hesitate you got to make a decision you got to do this you got to do that you got to commit so I think that’s also my teaching background which also is very helpful as a coach you know what I mean” (SPHSC001).

In the case of females in wrestling the ideas and messages coaches send to their athletes is even more pivotal as they are already competing in a world that's trying to defeat them. The messages are both verbal and nonverbal and will have a large effect on the athlete not only with performance but with developmental stages of identity.

Table 3.

Coaching Demographics

	Gender	Years Coaching	Gender Preference of wrestlers	Relationship with male coaches	Benefits
AHS	Male	13 years	Coaches males and females	----	Female/female competitions
LHS	Female	1 year	Females		
MB	Female	4 years	Females		Bodies are more flexible than boys
NHS	Female	1 year	Coaches males and females	Couple coaches are helpful, others disprove and refuse to support	Females are a lot more flexible
NHSC001		6 years			
NHS (2)	Female	4 years	Coaches males and females	Most coaches are supportive and helpful	Females are a lot more flexible
SPHS	Male	17-18 years	Coaches males and females	----	
SYHS	Female	8 years	Males currently, few females last year		

SYHSC001

Prefers
coaching
males only

Chapter 5: Discussion

This section discusses the findings from the study. Overall, the 5 dominant themes revealed many critical details concerning the unequal treatment of female athletes in high school wrestling.

Coded Results

Lack of Female space was an essential point of conversation as this is the driving and most powerful of the variables. As in, if there is no space for these ladies, they will systematically be pushed out without the coaches having to ask them to quit. These loopholes around title IX are more examples of the initial treatment when it comes to amenities and space availability as well as the allowance for females in the male culture. Zhu and Tse (2014) discuss the essential need for a positive environment that encourages one to be successful. As this may seem logical, in a male space such as a wrestling room, this is quite hard to provide. The space has always been male, providing male needs and providing a “male culture” which has been defined as a socialized space. As Genais, Hillard and Vescio (2010) pointed out children are socialized differently and as such they exhibit different behaviors. The coach serves as the main authority and the creator of the culture in the wrestling space, if they are aware and cognizant of the way they treat males and females they can create a culture of success for both genders. Male gaze is also a contradictory issue as Lanz and Schroeder point out (1999) this directly affects the performance of females in the space as they are more aware of their bodies and what males think of them rather than actually performing to their fullest potential. This is a common occurrence in wrestling spaces that are co-ed, and not

solely female. As the sport demands a very physical body, the fear of the male gaze to these female athletes is a real idea and they are fearful of being thought of as weaker, less able and not deserving to be on the mat.

Body Image was revealed to mean several different things to these young female athletes.

Oyserman, Terry and Bybee (2002) found that most young women did not see strength as a physical beauty, most of their participants did not even want to be considered strong, as they felt it made them less attractive. The singlet was also a topic of discussion as many of the participants felt uncomfortable wearing only the singlet in competition and brought up the issue of body size, the way the singlet fit, the way it made you look, and how the athletes felt wearing it. Many reported low feelings of confidence when wearing the uniform. Only 2 out of 68 reported feeling strong and empowered in the singlet. This is in line with the current research that often women are desiring to be strong, as strong is not considered feminine or attractive. As we move towards this empowerment movement, we will begin to see more female strength as symbols of power.

Violence in the sport was a common topic as well. This was an extreme variable as the athletes either felt very strongly that wrestling was violent and a tool for protection, while others considered it to be less violent and a way to prove themselves and push for gender equality. Miller (2008) talks about how the perspective of the sport and how you identify the characteristics of the sport will either deter or attract more to participate. In terms of females joining the wrestling team, if they are constantly being pushed away by perceived danger, not given basic amenities or a schedule and are not helped with their practices because they are told it is too violent, then they are more likely to not be attracted to such a team. The way the

sport is perceived also addresses this point as often wrestlers are thought of as big, bulky and aggressive athletes, but this is not always the case. Often great wrestlers demonstrate several different body types and until this message is made common, it may deter the more effeminate women from being attracted. Evans (2006) study resulted in similar outcomes that both boys and girls considered boys to be more tough and aggressive. These thoughts of self determine perceptions of the sport as well. Messner (2003) discusses how violence is a learned behavior and some learn it better than others, none the less it can be taught to any gender.

Sexuality was a topic that had several different faces. Conversations arose about many different outlets regarding sexuality. Hyper sexualization of females often impacted the identity of the females in the sport (Dworkin & Messner, 2002; Krane, 2001) as their responses were related to their body in the singlet, how they often felt uncomfortable as it defines them based on societal norms of women's bodies, and generally their sexualization was in question due to their participation in the sport. Overall, the responses were very tolerant of same sex relationships, and being comfortable discussing what that means to them and their team.

Gender Validation was revealed in many forms. Klomstein, A.T., Skaalvik, E. M., & Espnes, G.A. (2004), suggest that women are identified with the qualities of being weak, helpless, graceful and often non-athletic, emotional and passive. Whereas males are often strong, forceful, dominating, athletic, and brave. These gendered characteristics are clear examples of how and why society makes gendered validation when the female goes against the expected norm as listed above. These females in my study were almost jaded by the

amount of microaggressions they heard as a result of their participation in wrestling, where they are considered “strong for a girl”.

Coaching Perspectives

Oyserman, 2006, discuss how one of the best ways to influence the environment when it comes to athletes is by role-modeling. If this is so influential then the athletes are picking up on any messages that are being delivered both positive and negative. Kang and Stangl, (1991); Turman, (2010); Lyndon, Duffy, ET. Al (2011); as identity development is very dependent on mentorship, the coaches were leaders in the ways they responded and felt towards their female athletes. These coaches I was able to speak to were the pioneers of the sport as 3 out of 7 of the coaches started wrestling programs several years ago and have led the way for females in the sport.

Support from Peers

Most women also found comfort in the camaraderie they had with their female peers. This is a critical component as most females in this study were the “lone wolf” on the team, thus making it more of a challenge to stay dedicated with such obstacles being thrown at them (Fair, 2011). Although they may have been comfortable with female peers, many found that they had a perceived questionable sexuality based on their aggression, which was not an uncommon finding among other studies as well. Males were found to not take them seriously, and tolerate their hits, or in the other extreme hit them as hard as they could knowing they were inflicting harm (Hardin, 2009). The more experienced the women were in the field the more they were aware of the inequality in the ability to compete and practice in the same space as their male peers. From this, some female athletes are creating their own meaning of female appropriate behaviors (Krane, 2001). Moving forward, as suggested in

Young (1997) the more male support as well as family support in general is the essential component for positive feeling of self-worth and acceptance among the female athletes, and if provided can improve females sense of belonging in male space.

Acceptance and Equality

Macro, Viveiros and Cipriano (2009) offer a counter argument to all of the inequities I have mentioned above. This was an in-depth research report to explore women's identity in terms of body consciousness, sexuality and femininity. The women did not feel conflicted, they felt comfortable with their bodies and in general had no concern for perceived public opinion of their sexuality (Macro, Viveiros and Cipriano, 2009). This defies the norm, as it has been reported by many women that they do not feel accepted or comfortable as female athletes in the male space (Roth, A., & Basow, S. A., 2004). The authors (Macro, Viveiros and Cipriano (2009) distributed 47 surveys to high school students, university students and club female wrestlers. There were 8 in depth interviews given with all female wrestlers. The questions were all phrased in first person and contained information pertaining to body consciousness. This was measured by asking the following: *How did they feel about cutting weight?; How did they feel around males while wearing sports bras, etc.?* Although the responses offered positive feelings of acceptance and equality in the wrestling space, the way the researcher approached the athletes was with a hegemonic viewpoint. This was interesting as this whole line of questioning gives the male the power in this situation. This is indicative of how males play a crucial role in the identity development of females (Dworkin and Messner, 2002). In sum, the articles demonstrated that most research is centered on/around Male dominant perspective and forces women to comply with Male accepted ideology. Through the studies, wrestling was represented as a dynamic space where in certain context

proved to increase the young women's confidence, self-esteem, and can be seen in the responses regarding their body awareness, weight, appearance, wearing makeup etc. These responses serve as hope for an empowering future and support of women in wrestling and other male sports. While other spaces still remain traditional in their thinking and have not reached the progressive model needed to migrate towards gender equality.

Sports involvement for women has been increasing exponentially since the eighties. Women have begun to use their bodies in ways that contest the accepted social order that is male domination in sports (Messner, 1988). Females do not comfortably fit into male dominated spaces in athletic realms because it challenges the social constructs of what is male and female (Chimot & Loveau, 2010). After the passing of title IX, many more females participated in organized sports, although the "benefits" were outweighed by the disproportionate advantages historically enjoyed by the already privileged. (Stevenson, 2007). Since the passing of Title IX the number of women in male dominated sports has grown somewhat, and continues to do so (Walton, 2003; Young, 2006; Lenskyj, 1990). Many more sports teams as well as employment in sports were opened to women after the passing of Title IX, making a beginning in closing the gender gap that has been oppressing women across the world, and opening more opportunities for women throughout the sports world (Long and Caudill, 1991). With this growth, many other issues have arisen, as more female competitors desire to compete in more physical sports such as wrestling, boxing, football, and rugby (Young, 2006; Dworkin, S. L., & Messner, M. A., 2002; Cooky, 2009). The idea/theme of this paper has been to further explore the gender disparities that still exist in the world of athletics. These gender disparities are often unspoken, yet perpetuated through media exploitation and hyper-sexualization, unequal treatment, lack of support etc . Both

women and men in the realm of sports exhibit unexamined gender issues that affect the way women are accepted and perform (Videon, 2002; Krane, 2001). These are the unconscious beliefs about how women are less capable in contact sports, thus placing the idea of ability on gender and not on skill. This presents the dilemma of hyper-sexualization that impacts women's identity development (Dworkin and Messner, 2002; Krane, 2001), as often women are viewed for their appearance, not their contribution to the team. Offering one extreme or the other, women are positioned in such a way where skill is trumped by social expectations of femininity and beauty. For example, girls only have two options of feminine or masculine and cannot present themselves as both (Walton, 2005; Krane, 2001).

There is an obvious unequal representation in the amount of males to females that create a wrestling team. There are several different situations when it comes to females and wrestling in high school, as many public high schools are not adhering to Title IX and do not offer a primary or even a secondary space for women to compete. The law mandates that schools must be in compliance by offering equal amenities for sports activities, equal treatment in terms of equipment provided, funding allocated and opportunities given for competition. This lack of providing equal amenities (SPACE) to male and female athletes is a direct violation of Title IX implementation and needs to be corrected by the school district.

The administration and coaching staff must all be in compliance by offering these female athletes equal ability to perform, and that includes all resources that enable a strong performance.

This triangulation was a huge component as the actions of the coaches were a critical factor of female motivation to participate in a male dominated sport such as this when the

odds are stacked against them. Additionally, the pattern was clear regardless of school size; a disproportionately low number of female athletes participate in this sport.

Limitations and Future Directions

There were limitations to this study as I contacted female athletes at tournaments when they were under pressure to compete. In this regard it might have been a better idea to collect contact information and not to attempt to interview them as this may have interfered with their mindset. In some cases the coaches did not want an outsider to ask them questions or interrupt their preparation process.

A second limitation was the fact that not many parents attend wrestling matches and as such it was challenging to collect information if a parent was not present to sign the permission form. Sending out the surveys served as a limitation as the chance of getting the form back was extremely low. I approached over 300 athletes and surveyed approximately 78. The tournament style setting was a factor in the observation process as it presented time constraints as well as allowed less time to go in depth and collect and give all of the information needed.

Among the 43 schools contacted, approximately 10 were able to complete all parts of the research process. Although other schools responded the study was not able to utilize their athletes due to time constraints and travel constraints.

Further education is needed to confirm ideal images that are presented in the media, which focus on sport as a 'tool' rather than an enjoyable activity, and to encourage boys to recognize that competence in sports is not an essential part of the performance of masculine identity.

Lastly, the coaches that were interviewed were the allies of such change and the coaches that need to be spoken with concerning these growing campaigns declined to participate. Interviews should be conducted who do not necessarily feel that females should wrestle.

Conclusion

As the sport grows more and more of the success for female athletes will depend on allies, to encourage rapport between coach and athletes and well as create mentorship that will guide a new era of athletes. As we progress in the realm of male dominated sports and the popularity continues to grow, male coaches will be benefited by exploring the development of these young female athletes as they often have as many qualities to be successful as their male counterparts. Women have shown that they can bring great additions to the sport, and as we continue to grow in the sport, more advantages will be brought to light. All the stakeholders need to be encouraged to reorganize and reshape the traditional hegemonic policies and norms of what is acceptable in physical sport.

In moving forward we as educators and coaches need to speak to this global audience that has not addressed this lack of spatial equality, both physical and emotional as women are fighting a “gendered spatial headlock”. Women will continue to grow in this sport, their positionality will continue to change as a stand is taken on what is acceptably feminine.

Recommendations for gender sensitivity training for coaches, create buy in through athletic directors of how this will increase the confidence in young female athletes, and must create a palatable package for these male coaches who have no pretext or desire to learn about this topic, to actually care and become invested.

To understand further how this lack of spatial equality affects females, I will use an original conceptual framework of spatial belonging and the gendered headlock. How are these metaphors the dominant structure that dictates the actions of females and males alike in sport? In a paradox, when you actually teach girls to fight, it increases confidence and self-awareness which results in better life outcomes.

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