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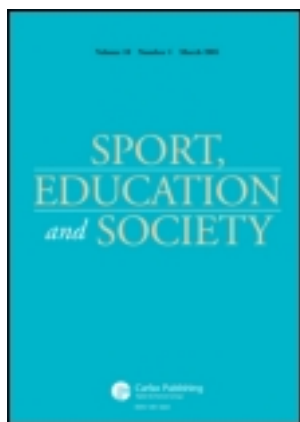
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Freedom between the lines: clothing behavior and identity work among young female soccer players

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Our research examines the relationship among identity, age, gender and athleticism through a study of the association between sports clothing and the identity work of pre-adolescent female soccer players. Based on participant-observation and interviews conducted at three co-ed youth soccer camps, we find that age is an important element of identity, particularly as it intersects with the girls' evolving understanding of femininity and engagement in athletics. While age can be credited with providing freedom in which clothing is deployed as a device for identity construction, its intersection with gender and athleticism also constrains girls' clothing behavior.

Keywords: *Age; Gender; Identity; Femininity; Sports clothing; Girls; Athleticism Childhood; Adolescence*

Leafing through a *Sports Authority* sales flier, Brittany, who is eleven years old and has played soccer for five or six years, points to an array of different colored athletic shorts and declares that she would wear 'this, this, that, that, and that, just not *that*'. '*That*' which she would not wear was a pair of pink shorts. 'I don't like pink', she explained, 'I'm not a pink person'.

'I didn't know there were brands' responded nine-year old Makenzie to a query about her favorite label for soccer clothes. 'You didn't know that there were different brands?' she was asked. 'I'm usually not a sport girl', she replied, confirming her 'first-timer' status playing at an organized soccer camp.¹

Different as they are, these two declarations of identity, prompted by conversations about sports clothing, illustrate the importance of style to self-expression. Functioning as our 'social skin' (Pomerantz, 2008, p. 18), clothing enables the expression of pre-existing identities and the construction of new ones. While attire is a resource for identity construction at any age, it arguably plays a more crucial role in adolescence because that is the stage in life where individuals most intensely 'struggle with, resist, and try on differing viewpoints and values in attempts to create a sense of self' (Phinney, 2008, p. 100).

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Girls' identity formation is understood by girls' studies scholars as open and incomplete (Bettis & Adams, 2005; Pomerantz, 2008), and their research generally underscores girls' attention to style and agentic use of clothing for identity construction. Through deliberate, yet experimental clothing practices which serve as symbolic resources for enacting identity (Coulter, 2005), girls use attire to 'try on' various versions of femininity (Williams, 2002). Malik writes, 'the conscious picking and choosing that occurs in girls' construction of self through fashion and style commodities is ripe with definitive possibilities for experimentation and self-invention' (2005, p. 270). Although this research on girls has focused on teenagers, increasingly, it also recognizes that practices associated with 'tween' girls, those between 8 and 13 years old, are just as complex as those of more advanced ages, and that as expressions of consumerist tastes and practices, their practices should be taken equally seriously (Cook & Kaiser, 2004). Given that normative girlhood today encompasses an expanded range of social roles and activities—such as athletic participation—through which sense of self is constructed, how does this complicate our understanding of the association between clothing and the enactment of identity?

In the research reported here we examine the relationship among identity, age, gender and athleticism through the study of the association between sports clothing and the identity work of (pre)adolescent female soccer players (ages 9–13). Such work is called for in light of the much-discussed increased purchasing power of girls of this age group (Harris, 2004; Mitchell & Reid-Walsh, 2005) and because of the steadily rising participation of girls in organized sport, especially soccer (Markovits & Hellerman, 2004; Messner, 2009). Our investigation of this association is guided by three central questions: (1) how do (pre)adolescent female soccer players use, choose and modify sports clothing to facilitate identity construction?; (2) how do the girls' clothing preferences and practices reflect presently held (yet evolving) identities and the constraints associated with such identities?; and (3) how does age, specifically, affect girls' understanding of femininity and engagement with athleticism in ways that, in turn, influence their clothing behavior? Our aim is to better understand what (pre)adolescent female soccer players' uses of and views on sports clothing reveals about their identity work, and to what extent prevailing conceptual approaches are able to account for their actions.

Theoretical background

Accounting for clothing consumption practices

Scholars have tended to regard the consumption of material goods such as clothing as either the expression or *outcome* of the structural location of identity in an individual's identity set (Stryker, 1968; Bourdieu, 1984) or as a *facilitator* in identity construction (Goffman, 1959; West & Zimmerman, 1987). According to Stryker's (1968) structural scheme, the higher the salience of a particular identity such as athlete, the greater the chance that behavioral choices like clothing decisions are in

line with expectations for that identity. Although Stryker's (1968) model applies specifically to role-based identities (such as an athletic identity), his framework is useful more generally in thinking about how all forms of identity (such as gender or age) carry with them certain demands that influence behavior. In contrast, the interactional perspective of West and Zimmerman (1987), which was devised to capture how the performance or 'doing' of gender accomplishes that identity, would not view clothing as a manifestation of an already existing identity but instead would treat it as a mechanism that facilitates identity construction (see also Solomon, 1983; Donnelly & Young, 2001). That is, distinct from role-based identities, identity is regarded instead as a product of social interaction and as something we 'do' rather than something we 'have'. Prevailing research on gender in sport studies is consistent with this latter perspective (Messner, 1990).

As dominant approaches, however, both are limited in their ability to offer nuanced insight into the interplay between identity and consumption behavior. Recognizing this, Dunn (2008) proposes combining the strengths of both into a concept he refers to as lifestyle, which he regards as generally rising from leisure pursuits, and which he defines as both a source of identity *and* as something that communicates identity through the symbolic use of goods and practices. Despite his shift away from structurally oriented notions of identity and consumption, Dunn (and other scholars) still acknowledges the association between consumption practices and pre-existing identities such as gender, race, class and age. Dunn's (2008) framework effectively integrates consumption's role in both expressing and facilitating identity; however, the concept of 'lifestyle' assumes that an individual's leisure pursuits are formative of an identity, something which may be more true for adults than for youth with multiple and changing leisure interests (see Boden, 2006). As a result, less well understood in research on consumption and identity is the effect of age. Focusing on age as an important element of identity, we see the views and activities of (pre)adolescents as ideal illustrations of the need to combine both structural and interactional theories on identity.

Age, though seemingly ascribed, is actually achieved like gender; that is, while chronological age is determined, how we enact age is flexible (Howard, 2000). Girls may choose their desired age orientation and be, for instance, teen-oriented 'little women' or child-oriented 'big girls' (Moore, 2001). Similarly, adolescent girls such as those Williams (2002) describes, 'try on gender' by actively resisting, experimenting with, and practicing gender, or the behaviors of mature femininity, in particular. In short, taking on gendered behaviors and identities is an important way that children reach for maturity, though how, or when, they do so varies. (Pre)adolescence then is clearly an 'in-between' phase in which girls have relative freedom for identity construction (in regards to their age orientation, gender performance, etc.) through clothing. However, while the enactment of age may be flexible, there are certain expectations that coincide with age as an element of

identity; in particular, as it intersects with gender and athleticism, age presents certain constraints which influence clothing behavior.

Rethinking athletic identity, gender, age and clothing

Athletic identity involves a strong commitment to an athlete role (Dickson & Pollack, 2000). Much of the scholarship on the identity work of female athletes deals with their negotiation of the so-called female/athlete 'paradox' or 'conflict'—the continued disjuncture between athletic roles and normative notions of femininity (Messner, 1988). Scholars have noted that boys are more likely than even female athletes to perceive themselves as skillful in sports and to describe themselves as 'athletes' (Coakley & White, 2001); these findings align with the intertwining of athleticism with boys' accomplishment of normative heterosexual masculinity but not with girls' achievement of normative femininity (Messner, 1990; Swain, 2003; Clark & Paechter, 2007). Nevertheless, even though the so-called 'gender regime' of sport may be regarded as patriarchal and heterosexist (Connell, 1987), there are also spaces in which its dominant ideologies are contested, leaving room for a range of meanings and identities in regard to gendered enactment (Messner, 1988). It is within this negotiable space where we find female athletes questioning social attributions about their bodies and wherein clothing becomes integral to their expression of who they are and who they are not, and in shaping who they want to be(come).

Prior research on female athletes finds that they employ various strategies while navigating the gender regime of sport. One strategy, known as the apologetic defense, involves overemphasizing stereotypically feminine behavior (e.g. wearing makeup or hair ribbons while playing) and downplaying aggression and toughness (Malcom, 2003). While today a second strategy, known as the *reformed* apologetic defense is more common, wherein so-called 'masculine' qualities are not downplayed, scholars still note attempts made by some female athletes to preserve femininity through dress and adornments (Wheat & Dickson, 1999; Krane *et al.*, 2004; Adams *et al.*, 2005). In contrast, a third route may be chosen by female athletes who actively resist looking 'girly' while playing; *if* they ever choose to emphasize their femininity, for some choose not to altogether, they do so outside the athletic sphere (Kelly *et al.*, 2005; Ross & Shinew, 2008).

While these studies illustrate the diverse possibilities of femininities and clothing practices among female athletes, we question the assumption that gendered behaviors (be they normative or not) among female sports players can be fully explained as negotiations of only their athletic participation and femininity. In particular, we consider age to be an important yet often neglected factor in understanding female athletes' clothing behavior. We argue, instead, that gender and athletic identity interrelate with age-related consumption practices in the context of sport participation. That is, we consider the notion that female athletes' clothing

behavior is solely a feminine gendered response to their athlete role or to the athletic setting to be inherently limiting.

Despite the now vast numbers of youth in organized sport (Messner, 2009), there is little research on the athletic identities of young athletes—male or female—perhaps because such an identity is not likely to be fully formed. As Malcom (2003) argues, displays of exaggerated femininity among some young female athletes—12- and 13-year-olds especially—might be better explained by their early adolescence than a need to make up for their athletic participation. Similarly, by distinguishing between ‘children’ and ‘*capoeiristas*’ (practitioners of Brazilian martial arts) in her description of youth participating in gymnastics and/or capoeira activities, Anderson (2001) suggests that variable degrees of engagement in sport in turn yields variable identifications. So while ‘athletic identity’ may not always be the most appropriate concept to apply to youth, attention to the identity work of female youth sports participants is needed in order to more clearly distinguish the relative influence that athletic participation, gender and age have (or do not have) on their behavior. To address this gap, our study focuses on ‘tween’ female soccer players—(pre)adolescent girls between the ages of 9 and 13—to capture how girls with a still-remaining freedom to enact girlhood before committing to more mature gender identities choose to display their athleticism and/or femininity through their attire. We argue, on the one hand, that because of such freedom, there is variation in how young female soccer players perceive themselves and use clothing to construct identities as specifically aged and gendered subjects. On the other hand, we anticipate that expectations of particular roles such as ‘athlete’ or identities such as ‘girl’ also work to shape or constrain the latitude in their clothing practices and preferences; these expectations, we argue, may vary to some degree according to age. Because a particular focus of our study is to understand the extent to which age serves as an axis of identity to mediate how girls’ clothing behavior reflects the different demands and experiences that come with femininity and athleticism, we anticipate that on the one hand while age can be credited with providing freedom in which clothing is deployed as a device for identity construction, on the other hand age, and its intersection with gender and athletic participation/identity, also constrains girls’ clothing behavior.

Methodology

This article is based on research conducted in the summer of 2008 at three youth soccer camps in Santa Barbara County, California: the California Coastal University (CCU) day camp, the Pass, Shoot, Score! day camp and the American Athletics overnight camp.² These three camps were chosen because our target population—girls, ages 9–13—would be present. The CCU day camp yielded five girls, the Pass, Shoot, Score! day camp five and the American Athletics camp twelve. Our sample

ultimately consisted of 22 girls: three 9-year-olds, eight 10-year-olds, six 11-year-olds, three 12-year-olds, and two 13-year-olds.

Participants' backgrounds are presented in the Appendix. The campers varied in skill, experience and degree of involvement with soccer. Although one participant had no prior experience playing soccer, and a few had played for just a few years, most had between five and seven years of experience with the sport. Most played with AYSO³ regardless of skill level, while some had elite club experience, and a few played on their school teams.

The sample was relatively ethnically and racially diverse, with three of the girls interviewed self-identifying as Asian, one as African-American and four as mixed heritage (i.e. identifying as partly non-white). Ten campers self-reported in interviews as white or Caucasian. Of those who did not self-identify, four were observed as white, though such observations cannot be confirmed. Whites comprised the majority of participants at all three camps. Socioeconomic status was ascertained by requesting residential zip codes from parents, as well as by asking interviewees about their parents' education and occupation; based on these measures, the participants were generally all middle to upper-middle class. The limited variation in the girls' socioeconomic backgrounds was because many of the participants were residents of Santa Barbara County, which has a median household income of US\$57,741, and a population that is 53% White, not Hispanic (U.S. Bureau, 2009). Besides the location of the study, attendees' demographics also reflected the participants of US youth soccer in general, who are mostly white, middle-class and live in suburban areas (Fields, 2005; Messner, 2009).

The fieldwork for our study was conducted by the first author who relied upon participant-observation and interview techniques for data collection. Introduced the first day of each camp as a researcher studying female youth soccer players, she was present for the entire camp 'day' (though she did not stay overnight at the American Athletics camp), and in total observed camp activities for approximately 78 hours. In a semi-participatory role similar to the 'friend' role (Fine, 1987), and sensitive to the ethics of studying vulnerable populations such as youth, she usually distanced herself from other adults present, refrained from taking on an authority position and simply tried to align herself with the campers by listening and asking questions during breaks. The campers often seemed more concerned with each other than with her. Besides these informal interactions with campers, she also assisted with or participated in camp activities on occasion, retrieving stray balls or playing in a scrimmage if requested.

Interviews were conducted at the camps with 18 of the 22 girls being observed. Ranging from 22 to 52 minutes, the average interview length was approximately 38 minutes. The interviews took place either before or after the camp 'day,' or during breaks throughout the day, and they loosely followed an interview schedule that consisted of questions regarding camp, experience with and commitment to playing soccer, soccer clothing and basic background information.⁴ Our insights into these girls' behaviors were facilitated by the experience of the first author who has played soccer since she was eight years old, has attended several summer

camps herself, and comes from a similar racial and class background as many of the interviewees.

Findings

Functionality and aesthetics: what not to wear

We began this research interested in learning to what extent sartorial considerations prevailed among female youth in sport settings. In contrast to much of the girls' studies literature depicting young girls' pre-occupation with fashion and style, 17 of the 18 girls interviewed (94%) expressed explicitly or implicitly that they do not really care about the clothes they wear to soccer. 'It really doesn't matter' or 'I don't really care' were common responses to questions about preferences and the importance of stylish or fashionable soccer clothes. In contrast, the girls frequently mentioned fit and comfort as being important factors in purchasing decisions. An equally practical consideration was cost, which mattered because it was a constraint usually imposed by parents.

Although aesthetic considerations may be downplayed relative to functional aspects, all commented on clothing style or color when asked, and a majority of those interviewed (83%) offered elaborated opinions about aesthetic elements such as style, 'how it looks', or color that counterbalanced considerations about functional criteria. Most prevalent were comments that revealed the girls' sophisticated understanding of clothes' communicative powers, manifested especially in discussions of 'what would not be appropriate' to wear to soccer activities vs. what clothes are the best indicators of soccer experience. Through these discussions, the girls demonstrated their recognition of clothing's role as both a *facilitator* of identity construction, and an *expression* of established identities.

All 18 interviewees (100%) were able to list at least one item that 'would not be the right types of clothes' to wear to soccer, and most importantly, their responses were fairly uniform: jeans, inappropriate footwear such as sandals, and dresses or skirts were the most commonly mentioned items. Moreover, the importance of wearing the 'right' thing was quickly learned, based on the girls' responses, and such knowledge was understood by the girls as important to feeling confident, especially when taking on a new role as first-time participant at soccer camp. Newcomer Makenzie (age 9), for example, realized that neither her shirts nor her shorts were quite 'right'. While she wore a ruffled skirt over white pocketed shorts for her first two days of camp, by her third day she stopped wearing the skirt, and did not mention it when asked to describe what she had been wearing that week. Makenzie's acknowledgment of nervousness, and of feeling better once she 'got certain stuff' (her soccer socks especially) highlights the importance of looking correct, but also of clothing's role in facilitating role performance, if not also identity construction.

While jeans or pants were frequently mentioned as inappropriate for soccer, as noted above, to the girls they specifically signal inexperience and/or the lack of a soccer player identity. Autumn (age 10), for example, noted that if she were to wear

pants to soccer ‘they might think that [she doesn’t] play soccer a lot’. Likewise Rebekah (age 11) remarked that ‘if you’re wearing jean shorts...they might see you as not [having] as much experience’. Thus, not knowing ‘what not to wear’ signaled inexperience and/or the lack of an identity as a soccer player.

In contrast to jeans or pants, team jerseys were prototypical markers of experience and of an authentic soccer player identity. As Madison (age 10) explained:

Especially if you have a jersey, that makes you feel—like makes you even more like, ‘oh she actually plays soccer’, especially if it’s like a jersey like for AYSO, or club soccer...if she came to the soccer camp with jeans on, people would say ‘she’s never played soccer [laughs] before’.

Responses from other girls, such as their clarification of the difference between a soccer team jersey, a soccer camp shirt and a ‘normal’ or ‘everyday’ shirt, affirmed this recognition of team jerseys’ power to express identity and status.

As these findings suggest, neither the structural nor the interactional perspective can fully account for clothing’s connection to identity; rather, they appear to demonstrate how both perspectives are necessary to understand the clothing behavior of these young female soccer players. In order to explore this further, in the following section we consider the relevance of age, an important yet often neglected element of identity in research on female athletes. Here, we find that on the one hand the girls’ age (pre- to early adolescence) allows for multiple and evolving understanding of femininity and engagement with athletics, and relative flexibility in the use of clothing for identity construction; on the other hand, age as a pre-existing identity poses particular constraints, inflected also by expectations associated with femininity and athleticism, which can work to influence clothing behavior.

Aged gender overshadows athletic participation

The significance of age became evident in the camp settings where campers were divided by age or where differences in skill level were accounted for by age. In this context, the girls frequently referred to other campers as ‘older’ or ‘younger’, used age as a reference for skill, and sought to distinguish themselves as more mature than younger campers (by physically distancing themselves or teasing each other with names such as ‘baby’ or ‘toddler’) or as different from (in their opinion) overly sexualized teenagers. In one way or another, age (or the girls’ perceptions and experiences of it) is central to the lives of these girls and hence is important to consider in regards to their clothing behavior.

The two cases that we discuss here exemplify, first, how the girls employ clothing in fashioning their desired aged and gendered identity, and second, how their clothing choices express the salience of certain identities and in particular the expectations associated with variously aged notions of femininity. In the following excerpt Maia and Michelle (both age 11) epitomize the tenuousness that often characterizes the transition from girl to woman:

Michelle: Um, some people, like the girls, usually they're more wearing loose clothing, and the teenagers of course they're wearing tighter things. You know? [laughs] *But I'm kind of in the middle*, I don't really like loose stuff so . . .

Maia: I don't like loose stuff or tight stuff so I like, yeah, *I'm like in the middle with her*. (emphasis added)

Positioning themselves in the space between 'girls' and 'teenagers', 'loose clothing' and 'tighter things', these girls have picked up on the distinct clothing behaviors of the two age (orientation) groups. On the cusp of adolescence, they have found a balance between the modest and less body-revealing clothing of childhood, and the tighter, shorter clothing of teens. Despite Cook and Kaiser's assertion that the 'tween' is an aspirational social identity of one who seeks to move 'up the age prestige ladder', Michelle and Maia seem comfortable hanging in the balance for the time being (2004, p. 206). In fact, earlier in the interview Maia affirmed with a laugh that it would not be good to play soccer wearing '*really really* short shorts like the teenagers'. As Williams (2002) argues, 'trying on gender', or the experimentation that occurs at the transition from girl to woman, is not always exaggerated—it may be tentative and unstable, or outright resistant.

In contrast to Maia and Michelle's seeming acceptance of their 'in-between' status and corresponding clothing choices, the following observed incident illustrates how clothing modification can be undertaken in order to achieve more 'mature' results:

After getting her camp t-shirt, Katy (age 10) cinched her shirt up on the side with a hair tie so that her stomach was showing, saying that she could 'make it look a little cuter'. Makenzie (age 9) and Charlotte (age 9) similarly cinched their shirts, though keeping their stomachs covered, and Charlotte told Katy that she looked like a teenager 'who thinks she's really pretty'. Katy responded, 'Three more years', until she would be a teenager. Makenzie begrudgingly added, 'Four more years'.

We have here another example of 'trying on gender', yet one in which the result is a rather exaggerated (and sexualized) version of teenage femininity. Clothing is here again treated as a resource with which the girls construct their identities; however, their navigation of what seems to be a fluid terrain is still shaped by normative expectations for femininity and particular age orientations.

While much of the previous research on female athletes implies that their behavior is invariably shaped by a negotiation of their femininity with their athletic participation (or the athletic context), Maia and Michelle's (both age 11) positioning of themselves (and dressing accordingly) in an intermediate orientation between girls and teens does not appear to reflect a consideration of their sports participation. Rather than the gender regime of sport fully shaping their behavior, these girls' choices reflect the expectations that come with their gendered age orientation as tweens not ready to fully engage with teenage femininity. Furthermore, while the incident of shirt-cinching described above could be characterized as an instance of exaggerated femininity typical of the apologetic defense, it was clear from the girls' conversation that their actions had little to do with their athletic participation. As Malcom (2003) argues, this incident shows how sport may just happen to be the site

for their reach for maturity and 'trying on gender', in this case a particularly sexualized version of teenage femininity. Even though such clothing modification exemplifies the girls' flexibility in identity construction, the girls did make a strong connection between teendom and its associated practices of emphasized femininity. In other words, while the girls are deliberate in their clothing behavior, they are simultaneously influenced or even constrained by the variations in expectations for normative femininity according to age.

Still young and early in their sports careers, the majority of the girls in our study have not gone through the 'identity tunnel' yet, a process in which young athletes are directed into fewer and fewer activities, all of them sports-related (Coakley, 1992). Their varying levels of engagement with soccer are in part a function of their youth, and consequently we must be open to the possibility that their clothing behavior is at times more influenced by age and gender than their athletic participation. Many girls mentioned other activities that they are involved in such as dance, horseback riding, music lessons, volleyball, field hockey and Girl Scouts to name a few. In fact, several girls mentioned activities that they were *planning* to start in the future. Their age, in other words, also contributes to how they see their participation in soccer more generally. It appears that while they have varying degrees of affinity to the sport, overall there is little sense that any of the girls have yet developed encompassing lifestyle identities out of their participation.

The outer bound of athleticism: replica jerseys

While the girls' clothing behavior at times was shaped more by their aged gender than their athletic participation, their varying degrees of engagement with soccer and athleticism more generally did manifest itself in some of their clothing choices. The examples discussed here will illustrate how on the one hand the girls' choice not to wear replica jerseys expresses the relatively low salience of their identity as soccer players or athletes. We argue that their young age in addition to their understandings of expectations for normative femininity contribute to this relative disengagement from soccer (and from clothing that would express a strong affinity to the sport). On the other hand, their use of replica jerseys in order to construct a soccer player or 'sporty' identity is also evident, further confirming the fact that to some extent the girls do not feel secure in such identities.

Only six of the 18 girls who were interviewed owned a replica jersey (reproductions of national or professional team jerseys), and even fewer actually wore one to camp; in contrast, casual observation revealed that many more boys wore them at camp, and the girls recognized that gender difference. Daphne (age 12), for example, said that though she does not wear them, the 'guys' are 'really into that'. This gender difference in the prevalence of replica jerseys among boys vs girls speaks to how identities of boys (which also may be expressed through clothing) are heavily invested in soccer, more so than are girls' identities, a finding that may be explained by the fact that a sports identity is more important in accomplishing traditional

heterosexual masculinity than femininity. Male youth emulate sports stars and work to construct a 'sporty' image via self-styling; as Swain notes, 'by the time many boys [in the UK] have reached the age of 10 or 11 they will have spent thousands of hours. . . trying to look like and emulate the moves of their professional heroes' (2003, p. 303). In contrast, the girls cited a lack of knowledge and/or interest in national or professional teams when explaining why they did not own replica jerseys. Rebekah (age 11) reasoned that it is because she 'barely know[s] anything about it [soccer]', and Brittany (age 11) explained "Cause I don't like watch soccer on T.V. or anything, I'm not like *that* into [laughs] it. I just like playing it, I don't like watching it'. Katy (age 10) and Michelle (age 11) similarly distinguished their participation from any deeper interest in the sport on a national or professional level: Katy said, 'I just play it because I want to have fun, and so I'm just not into the teams' and Michelle responded with, 'I just like playing it'. The contrast between what has been noted about boys' interest in sport, and these girls' disinterest in replica jerseys and in national/professional teams more generally, supports our understanding of how sports factor into the accomplishment of normative masculinity more so than normative femininity, and how that, in turn, shapes their clothing practices.

How important athleticism is (or is not) in achieving gendered expectations is likely associated with the chances for an individual to develop a lifestyle identity based on their participation. As we noted earlier, boys (even those who do not regularly play sports) are more likely to perceive themselves as athletic, and even physically active girls define sport in a narrow way and are less likely to have strong athletic identities. Likewise, with the girls in our research, their participation in soccer was not enough for all of them to comfortably identify as athletes; in fact, two girls actually flat out rejected the athlete label. For Katy (age 10), the difficulty in accepting the label lay in her limited involvement, while Makenzie (age 9) explained saying, 'I play, but I'm not that good'. Others like Chantel (age 13), were hesitant to characterize themselves as athletic. When asked, 'Would you call yourself that though?' Chantel replied, 'Um, I would call myself, uh, I would say I'm pretty—ok, I'm athletic. . . Maybe not strong, but athletic in terms of [laughs] sports'. Maia (age 11), on the other hand, initially accepted the 'athlete' label, but eventually decided that 'sporty' was a better descriptor saying, 'I'd have to go with sporty because. . . I'm too lazy, I don't like [to] run'. These responses point to a particular understanding of the terms 'athlete' or 'athletic', an understanding which highlights qualities such as strength, skill, commitment, a 'win orientation', and fitness/stamina. These qualities, we would argue, are those traditionally thought of as masculine, so it is no surprise that some of the girls were hesitant to identify in such a manner.

While there were girls who expressed a strong affinity for and commitment to soccer, and for whom accepting the athlete label was not a problem, in general the girls' participation in soccer had not translated into a lifestyle identity or strong identification with the sport. Their *disuse* of replica jerseys speaks to this, and their comments regarding an occasional use of the jerseys serves as confirmation. Madison (age 10), for instance, preferred wearing such jerseys to soccer practice or camp because they 'kinda make [her] *feel more soccer*'. Similarly, Rebekah (age 11) revealed

that she would wear one 'to school, maybe, if [she's] *trying to be more sporty*' (emphasis added). These statements illustrate the role of clothing in facilitating identity construction, providing further support for our estimation of the relatively low salience of an athletic or soccer player identity for these girls. The girls' youth and relative inexperience, combined with the fact that expectations for normative femininity generally do not include athleticism (or at least that athleticism is not crucial for the achievement of normative womanhood), led the girls to reject replica jerseys and what they represent, and/or to use them strategically in order to bolster their sense of themselves as soccer players.

The color pink

Besides their disuse and/or strategic use of replica jerseys, the relevance of age to the girls' understandings of femininity and engagement with sport is also evident in their actions and views regarding the color pink. In this final section of our analysis, we will once again illustrate the utility of both the interactional and structural perspectives for understanding the identity-clothing connection. For a number of the girls, their views and choices regarding pink involved deliberate efforts to construct and perform their identities in particular ways. However, their clothing behaviors were also the outcome of certain variably aged expectations that come with both gender and athleticism. While their varied opinions reveal the flexibility these girls have with how they enact girlhood, certain patterns are evident which suggest that age, femininity and athleticism do present constraints which shape their clothing behavior.

When clothing genders the body, the color of clothing is an important element in that gendering process (Martin, 1998). The color pink and its variants proved to be an important site that differentiated these girls' expressions of femininity, athleticism and age. Pink has traditionally been known as a feminine color, the lighter shade being typically associated with softness, innocence, delicacy and childhood (Pomerleau *et al.*, 1990). As Koller (2008) notes, this color is weighted with meaning, probably more than any other color and often those meanings are negative. Nevertheless, among the 18 girls who were interviewed, 13 of them wore pink in some way at least once during their week at camp; most did not call any attention to it, but a few revealed that it was their favorite color. Notably, those who identified pink as their favorite color were on the younger end of the spectrum (two 9-year-olds, one 10 and one 11). Though speculative, perhaps they are young and inexperienced enough in this sport that they simply have continued to wear their favored color (often popular among young girls) in soccer with little concern of the potential 'conflict' it may pose to their athleticism.

In contrast, a few others held quite negative connotations about the color, and rejected it for their soccer clothes. Rebekah (age 11), for instance, was one camper who was wary about pink; when asked her opinion about a black and pink goalie

jersey she said that although she liked it, she wasn't 'really sure' and would probably 'just wear plain'. When she was encouraged to explain why, she answered:

It's just like, *when I'm playing soccer* I try not to like be *too girly*, 'cause it just seems not that much of a [laughs] threat or anything [...] you don't want to seem like (in a high pitched voice) 'oh my gosh I broke a nail', you know, 'oh my gosh I'm gonna start crying'. (emphasis added)

This statement suggests that for Rebekah, pink equals girly, equals unthreatening or unintimidating, equals weak—none of which are especially desirable qualities for a soccer player, at least from her perspective. What her words also reveal is her deliberate rejection of pink in the soccer setting in order to establish herself as a serious player and distance herself from a form of femininity she deems inappropriate for soccer.

While Rebekah and some others rejected pink, Amelie (age 13) embraced it and was in fact the only girl who clearly expressed the reformed apologetic defense, mentioned earlier. Amelie liked the pink and black goalie jersey, and preferred it to a black and yellow one she had worn before that had made her 'feel very masculine'. She explained saying 'I would like that, 'cause it makes you feel like "*I'm a girl, I know what I'm doing*"... *it shows who you are*' (emphasis added). For Amelie, wearing pink would indeed be a way to prove her femininity while simultaneously demonstrating her athletic skills. *Who she is* involves equally her identity as a girl and a soccer player, and a decision to wear pink while playing would be a strategy employed to construct and demonstrate such a dual identity. Rebekah and Amelie's statements exemplify the girls' thoughtful employment (though hypothetical in this case) of clothing to achieve specific ends—identity construction as a *non-girly* soccer player or as a *girl* who also plays soccer.

While some of the girls appear to be quite conscious of their efforts to construct desirable identities through clothing, many of their comments also reflected their perception that pink is indicative of 'certain types of people' or is expressive of a particular identity. Such perceptions are consistent with Stryker's (1968) conceptualization of identity, or the notion that clothing choices would be an outcome of pre-existing identities. In fact, emergent patterns do suggest that to some degree, the girls' views on pink are shaped by their established (though evolving) identities. Specifically, we argue that for reasons having to do with differently aged expectations associated with femininity and athleticism, 11- and 12-year-olds were most likely to reject pink while girls 13 and older were more likely to (re)claim it as appropriate for soccer.

Expressing views similar to Rebekah's when explaining why she did not like wearing pink, Brittany (age 11) remarked, 'like if I'm wearing a pink [jersey] and all this like girly stuff, it's kinda like "oh she sucks, so just go...easy on her"'. Such resistance to looking 'girly' while playing is one strategy of negotiation used by female athletes who, if they ever choose to emphasize their femininity, do so outside the

athletic sphere. Because this behavior is not uncommon and likely springs from the devaluation of femininity typical of the gender regime of sport, it warrants closer attention. Despite advances in women's status in sports, we still today see the disjuncture between athleticism and femininity being manifest in various ways such as rejecting pink. In other words, partly in response to the masculinist gender regime of sport, some female athletes have taken on contextual or situational femininities dependent on the environment; as Paechter says, 'how we enact masculinities and femininities changes as we move between groups, between places and spaces and through time' (2003, p. 138).

For others, the desire to wear pink while playing brought consideration of other factors operating within the sport context. At 13 years old, Amelie is an age at which girls are especially concerned with demonstrating an appropriately *gendered* maturity, experiencing more pressure to conform to norms of conventional femininity and becoming more aware of the potential 'paradox' of being a female athlete. In other words, Amelie may be responding to being held accountable to certain expectations of adolescent femininity; these expectations are notably different for girls 11 and 12 years old, the age at which the most aversion to pink was expressed.

Amelie was not alone in her preferences; in fact a number of teenage girls at the American Athletics camp wore hot pink pre-wrap headbands or put hot-pink shoelaces in their cleats. While such fashion flair and so-called 'girliness' would most likely be scorned among some of the younger campers,⁵ among the teens it was instead recognized as an indication of love for and commitment to the sport. While 13 year old Chantel was not personally invested in being stylish on the field, she acknowledged the efforts of her more fashion conscious campmates, her age and older:

Girls who love the socks and love the—like picking out all the right stuff for soccer, then you know they *really* play, they *really* love to do it, and they like to look [laughs] stylish for it too. So I'm like, 'ohh, that's cute!'

The possibility that it is in fact the more involved players who are especially fashion conscious aligns with Stryker's (1968) identity theory and other scholars' previous research (Casselman-Dickson & Damhorst, 1993; Dickson & Pollack, 2000). Relatedly, hot pink connotes post-feminist sexuality, independence and fun (Koller, 2008) (especially on mature female bodies), and it may be less threatening to their identities as soccer players than would be a pink jersey for an 11 year old, for instance. In other words, pink on the body of a younger (and presumably less skilled) female player has more potential to be associated with negative characteristics for a soccer player (softness, delicacy, etc.) than it does positive characteristics for a female (sexuality, fun). The older girls (generally 13 and up) have less to lose by reclaiming pink and showing attention to dress; even if they risk the chance of losing credibility as a player, they gain the valued qualities associated with a fun and sexualized femininity.

Conclusion

Consumption is 'part of a cultural process involving social activity, identity work, and the negotiation of agency' (Nayak & Kehily, 2008, p. 128). Clothing then, is a perfect entry point into an examination of processes of the self; however, rather than treat something as everyday as sports clothing 'as a self-contained universe of inquiry' (Smith, 1987, p. 90) this study values girls' commentary about and use of sports clothing for what it can tell us about larger social relations such as the gender regime of sport and the relevance of age and its intersection with gender and athletic identity.

The research revealed age to be an important axis of identity, though it is necessary to point out that while age is at times a useful unifying characteristic, chronological age does not fully define these girls any more than does their gender. In fact, the concept of *age orientation* better reflects the constructed nature of age, not to mention the close connection between enactment of age and gender (Moore, 2001). Nevertheless, conducting research with 9-to 13-year-olds in particular is significant since this age group has been neglected both in the sociology of sport literature on female athletes, as well as in girlhood studies until recently.

Beyond acknowledging that this age group is generally understudied, why is age important in making sense of the girls' clothing behaviors? For one, at this age in particular, girls find themselves with a good deal of flexibility in their identity work. With identity conceptualized as open and shifting, 'normative femininity is in a liminal state with the old markers of normative girlhood such as prettiness [standing] alongside the new markers of assertiveness and independence' (Bettis & Adams, 2005, p. 10). Options abound, in other words, and the girls are conscious of and deliberate in their clothing choices which serve to facilitate their identity work. As Hollows (2000, p. 132) writes, 'identities are not fixed but something we can play with, construct, and reconstruct through our use of commodities'.

While an interactional model (Solomon, 1983) of identity's relationship to clothing is applicable to the girls' experiences, the full story cannot be told without also considering the relevance of a structural framework (Stryker, 1968), or how identities (and particularly demands of identities) shape and are expressed by clothing behavior. Even as girls' age opens up possibilities for negotiation and experimentation with identity, it also shapes their behavior to some extent. As a form of identity, age intersects with both gender and athletic identity, presenting certain demands which limit the girls' flexibility, and even influencing what may look like choices made freely. For instance, differing levels of involvement and commitment that come with age impact one's sense of identity as a sports player; likewise, feelings regarding the enactment of femininity (e.g. acceptance, resistance, etc.) may also vary with age. In fact, at times the intersection between gender and age is so important that it actually overshadows the sport context in shaping the girls' clothing behavior. These varying expectations and experiences of identity are subsequently reflected in the girls' clothing preferences and practices.

Serving as our 'social skin', clothing can be a tool for identity construction as well as an expression of pre-existing identity demands. By bridging the gap between two theories of identity, we offer a more complete understanding of how age functions as an important axis of identity which both fosters and constrains identity work and clothing behavior. The young female soccer players in our research have room to run freely, declaring themselves to be 'not a pink person' and 'not usually a sports girl'; however, while these girls may run the full length and width of the field, their movements are still restricted by its white lines, which may be crossed, but only at risk of penalty.

Notes

1. All participants' names have been changed.
2. Names of camps have been altered and/or left without the specific dates attended.
3. AYSO, the American Youth Soccer Organization, was established in California in 1964. At the time of its founding, the league was for boys only; girls started participating in 1971. AYSO currently has over 650,000 players on more than 50,000 teams (Messner, 2009). By 2001–2002, there were 348,000 girls and 317,000 boys ages 6–18 years old registered in AYSO (Markovits & Hellerman, 2004).
4. A complete list of the interview questions is available from the authors.
5. For example, Raegan (10), Jessica (10) and Nicole (11) were observed laughing about another camper wearing a dress (this was in reference to Sydney (10), who was carrying a pink purse, but was not wearing a dress). 'This is *soccer*', they said. Another camper added, '[soccer] is about being aggressive and knocking people down and stuff'. Daphne (12) commented that 'People who are like really girly or something, new to soccer, they'd probably wear like I don't know, like all pink or whatever their style, and then might not have the right type of shoes'.

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Appendix: Participants' backgrounds

Camp	Name (* = interviewee)	Age	Years of experience	Current level of play	Race/Ethnicity
CCU Day Camp	Emma*	9	5	AYSO	White
	Madison*	10	5	AYSO	White/Hispanic
	Autumn*	10	5	AYSO—Select	Chinese, German, English
	Rebekah*	11	2–3	AYSO	White/Non-white
	Brittany*	11	6	AYSO—All Stars	White/American, Indian, Irish/Non-white
Pass, Shoot, Score! Day Camp	Charlotte*	9	4–5	Soccer gym class	–
	Makenzie*	9	0	Starting AYSO in fall	White
	Katy*	10	5	AYSO	White
	Savanah	10	5–6	AYSO	–
	Amelie*	13	7	School team	Caucasian
American Athletics Camp	Jessica	10	–	AYSO—All Stars	–
	Raegan*	10	6–7	AYSO—All Stars	White/Non-white
	Alexandria*	10	6–7	Club—Premiere	Italian/Portuguese
	Sydney*	10	6–7	Club—Select	American/Dutch
	Kaley	11	–	AYSO—All Stars	–
	Michelle*	11	2–3	City league	White
	Nicole	11	–	AYSO—All Stars	–
	Maia*	11	7–8	AYSO—All Stars and Club	Asian/Hispanic
	Daphne*	12	6–8	Club	Asian
	Hope*	12	2	School team	Asian
	Phan*	12	< 1	School team	Asian
Chantel*	13	9	AYSO	African American	