

MARKETING OF PROFESSIONAL WOMEN'S SOCCER IN THE UNITED STATES
THROUGH FEMINIST THEORIES

by

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(Under the Direction of James J. Zhang)

ABSTRACT

Despite the success of the United States Women's National Team (USWNT), two women's soccer leagues have quickly failed in the U.S. This doctoral dissertation examines the past and present of the marketing of professional women's soccer in the United States emphasizing feminist themes to fulfill three objectives: (a) to critically examine the history of the marketing of women's soccer in the United States to identify and gain a better comprehension of changes in theory and practice of marketing in women's soccer in the U.S. over time; (b) to identify and explain the use of three feminist themes in the marketing of women's soccer, specifically in the NWSL; and (c) to analyze the impact of these three feminist themes on the related marketing strategies used within in the NWSL in an effort to build a framework while also developing recommendations for marketing practitioners for the promotion and marketing of professional women's soccer in the United States. The historical analysis segment revealed that the failure of the first two professional women's soccer leagues in the United States were largely a result of poor resource allocation and an inability to connect with and retain fans, the media, and sponsors. The Women's United Soccer Association (WUSA) burned through capital at an unsustainable rate and was unable to maintain the excitement of the 1999 Women's World

Cup, leading to microscopic television ratings and perennially falling attendance. The second professional league, Women's Professional Soccer (WPS) struggled through a disadvantageous television deal and could not overcome missteps in ownership and a lack of leadership from the league. Interviews with officials from teams in the third professional women's league, the National Women's Soccer League (NWSL) revealed the evolution of professional women's soccer marketing based on feminist themes as well as the impact of those themes on general marketing practices. The findings revealed a continued inequity of resources, softening attitudes towards the LGBT community, and the construction of a consumption community based on ideals of heteronormative femininity. Issues were raised on how teams compensated for an inequity of resources through social media, expanded target markets, and a pursuit of different revenue streams. Extensive discussions are focused on seeking viable solutions to promote professional women's soccer.

INDEX WORDS: Feminist theory, Soccer, Women's Sport, Women's Professional Soccer, Women's United Soccer Association, National Women's Soccer League, Consumption community, LGBT, Heteronormative femininity

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

FIFA	<i>Fédération Internationale de Football Association</i>
NWSL	National Women's Soccer League
USSF	United States Soccer Federation
USWNT	United States Women's National Team
WPS	Women's Professional Soccer
WUSA	Women's United Soccer Association

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Women's soccer in the United States has endured a tense dichotomy for the better part of three decades. Initially seldom seen or talked about for its first fifteen years of existence, the U.S. Women's National Team (USWNT) found itself being thrust in the spotlight as symbols of a new type of feminist empowerment in lieu of its stirring triumph at the 1999 Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) Women's World Cup, culminating with a title win over China that captured the attention of not only scores of fans around the nation, but a previously disdainful media.

Despite the USWNT's rapid rise to stardom that saw them grace the covers of countless magazines and the appearance of its players on many television shows right after their World Cup win, examination of the effect of that Summer in 1999 largely dwelled on a pure sociological perspective. While the most notable study (Christopherson, Janning, & McConnell, 2002) mirrored that of other feminist and critical studies that had delved into content and thematic analysis of the constructed narrative in women's sport, little systematic study was undertaken in establishing how feminist themes (e.g., inequity in resources, rules and coverage, embrace of motherhood, family values, and role models while shunning the "other," and building of a consumption community through the promotion of ideal heteronormative femininity) had been used to sell the USWNT before and during that successful tournament despite a litany of evidence supporting such themes appearing anecdotally. The above themes have been commonly found in previous examinations of relationship between feminism and sport (Burstyn, 1999;

Caudwell, 1999; Kane & Lenskyj, 1996; Messner, 2002) and their absence in examinations of women's soccer contexts in the United States may be obscuring potential ways in which the USWNT's success and professional women's club leagues' failures can be explained.

Early research into women's soccer issues before the 1999 FIFA Women's World Cup largely tended to take root outside of North America, examining the sport through interviews and content analysis with an eye towards feminist themes (Caudwell, 1999; Cox & Thompson, 2004; Knoppers & Anthonissen, 2004; Williams, 2004). Despite an ever increasing amount of discussions regarding women's soccer through social media and internet media channels, research into women's soccer at the club level after the 1999 FIFA Women's World Cup has been scant. This is especially surprising given the establishment of three professional leagues of women's soccer in the United States since 1999 although two of those leagues have failed after three seasons. What research has been done on these leagues has largely focused on women's soccer from a pure marketing sense; even so, a majority of the studies were conducted only on WUSA over a decade ago (e.g., Jowdy & McDonald, 2003).

Specifically, there has been no examination of the marketing of an American professional women's soccer league through a lens of feminist themes. In previous inquiries, feminist themes have been used to dissect and critique inequities within all walks of society, including sport, in an effort to bring about change to reduce and eventually stamp out these differences. Thus, examining professional women's soccer through these feminist lenses would allow for a detailed and pertinent evaluation of some of the inequities that have been rife within American sports, and specifically American women's soccer, for generations. Also, previous inquiry into the historical evolution of the marketing of women's soccer in the United States has been done in piecemeal through books and news articles but never through a systematic research

examination. Additionally, the current marketing environment of the latest professional league, the National Women's Soccer League (NWSL), has gone unexamined, though given the length of existence of the new league, this is perhaps to be expected. One of the major cruxes of feminist theory is the notion of the continuing pursuit of equality between the genders, something that women's sport in general has struggled with for decades (Blinde, Greendorfer, & Shanker, 1991; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Kane & Lenskyj, 1996; Messner, 2002). Looking at the NWSL and its marketing through a feminist lens would allow the researcher to examine the progress towards equality, from issues that have persisted from the earliest days of women's sport and soccer such as the pursuit of equality in funding and opportunity, to newer challenges that have emerged in the 21st century, such as the battle against homophobia and the shift towards embracing marketing to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) audiences. It is necessary to find evidence and identify the cause and solutions so as to make viable recommendations for further steps to smooth the path towards equality. Achieving this equality will not only benefit society at large but potentially help with the longevity and viability of the NWSL, the newest league seeking to succeed in a challenging place where prior leagues have failed.

The absence of research on marketing in women's soccer both in general and through feminist lenses is particularly glaring given the documented popularity and interest in the sport both through the USWNT and in a participatory sense (De Varona, 2004; Grainey, 2012; Ladda, 2000; Lisi, 2013; Longman, 2001; Markovits & Hellerman, 2001, 2004). In that vein, the existence of a third professional league despite the spectacular failure of the two previous leagues indicates a willingness to find a working solution for a viable league that could be well served by a timely, systematic study of marketing practices.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to better understand the marketing of professional women's soccer through themes of feminism. Specifically, the objectives of the proposed study included: (a) to critically examine the history of the marketing of women's soccer in the United States to identify and gain a better comprehension of changes in theory and practice of marketing in women's soccer in the U.S. over time; (b) to identify and explain the use of three feminist themes in the marketing of women's soccer, specifically in the NWSL; and (c) to analyze the impact of these three feminist themes on the related marketing strategies used within in the NWSL in an effort to build a framework while also developing recommendations for marketing practitioners for the promotion and marketing of professional women's soccer in the United States.

Significance of Study

Many facets of this study are unique in nature given the existing literature within women's soccer, feminism, and marketing, mainly in two perspectives: (a) the examination of marketing within professional women's soccer in the United States and (b) the examination of feminist themes within marketing of women's soccer. Despite the fall of two leagues and the rise of another, inquiries into why the failed leagues and their marketing have not resonated with the public have been absent. These missing examinations have proven more glaring when considering the continued desire by entities in the United States to establish a successful women's soccer league despite previous failures. In particular, at a time when more women than ever are participating in sport, the lack of a feminist perspective into examining past failures and current attempts at success is puzzling. Sport has often been a premier battleground in the fight for equality, a main goal of feminism. Thus, the lack of feminist examinations of professional

women's soccer in the United States has been an apparent oversight when such examinations could help explain inequality in these leagues compared to men's leagues and potentially help bridge gaps to set the sport on a path closer to equality and success.

The findings from this study contribute to the sport management literature in numerous ways. First, the historical analysis of the marketing of women's soccer in the United States provides a cohesive backbone and context by collecting and unifying marketing data on women's soccer that has been disparate and scattered. Much has been written about the general growth of women's soccer around the globe thorough, albeit dated, pieces, including the trials and tribulations of the game on multiple continents and from economic and sociological perspectives. However, much of this work in regards to women's soccer in the U.S. stopped with the end of the 1999 FIFA Women's World Cup having previously examined the rapid growth of the sport among youths. A comprehensive examination of the history of marketing of women's soccer in the U.S. helps fill gaps in past research, as well as adds sorely needed updates to the literature with events and trends of the past decade and a half.

Additionally, this study's adoption of document analysis and case study interviews expands the knowledge of the use of feminist themes in the marketing of sport, specifically of professional women's soccer in the United States through the NWSL. While feminism and its connection with women's soccer in the United States has been examined at a sociocultural level, most famously after the 1999 FIFA Women's World Cup (Christopherson et al., 2002; Cox & Thompson, 2004; De Varona, 2004), little has been done to broadly and systematically examine any connections between feminism and how women's soccer in the United States is marketed at professional club level. Indeed, little has been done in terms of research at sociocultural or economic levels towards any professional women's soccer league in the United States despite the

existence of three leagues over the course of a decade and a half. Given the continued efforts by individuals and organizations to attempt to make such a league viable despite two noted failures, as well as the continuing popularity of both the USWNT and youth soccer nationwide, there appears to be a need for an in-depth understanding of the women's soccer market environment. With the marketing struggles felt by many professional women's teams to this day, this study has the potential to provide a blueprint for clubs to more effectively reach and market to their fan base through feminist themes. There is no doubt that this study adds to the feminism literature within sport through its examinations of women's soccer in the United States, which has gone sorely unexamined since the events of the 1999 FIFA Women's World Cup. Figure 1 provides a visual overview of how the marketing of professional women's soccer through feminist themes has been examined.

The following chapter outlines the theoretical framework that serves as the basis for the dissertation. The methodology described after allows for a detailed review and examination of the marketing of professional women's soccer through feminist themes and the impact of feminist themes on the strategies and tactics of marketing a professional women's soccer club in the United States by adopting a case study approach that utilizes document analysis and interviews with NWSL marketing managers. The first of the three included articles systematically examines the history of the marketing of women's soccer in the United States, providing a coherent narrative for the success and failures of such marketing. The second of the three included articles details through document analysis and interviews with NWSL marketing managers how feminist themes have been at the core of league and club marketing. The third of the three included articles examines through document analysis and interviews with NWSL

marketing managers how specific tenets of sport marketing in the league and its clubs have been impacted by feminist themes.

Finally, a conclusion provides a brief summary of the findings and takeaways from the dissertation and offers theoretical and practical implications of these findings. Notably, the conclusion summarizes the success of the USWNT's marketing efforts in the past and how the first two professional leagues in the United States failed to replicate those efforts. The conclusion also summarizes the steps, through feminist themes, that the NWSL and its clubs have taken to avoid the pitfalls of the failed leagues and how they are meeting marketing challenges, both old and new, to build for the future.

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CHAPTER 2

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The following sections will introduce the theoretical framework of this dissertation by reviewing feminism in a broad sense and some key tenets of feminism (e.g. gender theory and gender barriers) that are applicable to this project. These include: (a) Inequity of Rules, Resources, and Coverage, (b) Ideal Heteronormative Femininity and a Consumption Community, and (c) Heteronormative Femininity Marketing in Women's Soccer.

Feminism in Sport

Definitions of feminism have been deconstructed and constructed for decades while branching out into the realm of gender theory. The growth of feminism over the past half-century has largely been built on a foundation of what feminism actually means, with the concept often meaning something different entirely to two different people who declare themselves feminists (McRobbie, 2009). This has made it hard to define 'feminism' as a single construct, but Birrell (2000) argues that this constant debate is what has helped empower feminism as a strong, deep theory. Feminism has usually been divided into three distinct 'waves' by scholars, each in a distinct time period and with its own political and social reality.

First-wave feminism largely applied to the common cause of women's suffrage, emerging at the heart of the industrial revolution during a surge of more liberalized politics. A key flashpoint was the Seneca Falls Convention, where Elizabeth Cady Stanton drew up the Seneca Falls Declaration, putting forward a platform towards equality between men and women.

(Madsen, 2000). Despite a focus on suffrage, women with this first-wave of feminism also dabbled in the abolition movement and trying to cast off the shackles of patriarchy that demanded docile subservience to husbands in the homes (Heywood, 1997).

Second-wave feminism largely took hold in the 1970s and 1980s with a premise of sex and gender being distinct (Butler, 1993). The anti-war protest movement in the second half of the twentieth century helped catalyse and grow second wave feminism, which, having earlier won the vote, turned its attention towards reproductive rights and a freedom of sexuality. But this brand of feminism largely painted women as being universally similar and facing identical challenges while trying to unify behind singular political aims. However, second-wave feminism eventually came under heavy criticism for homogenising the experience of women into a one-size-fits-all mold, while ignoring important factors such as race, sexuality, and class in molding the experience of different strata of women (Evans, 1995).

The 1990s brought third-wave feminism to prominence, with Judith Butler, among other things, seeking to bring the above complicating factors into focus when examining the struggles of women in achieving equality. Many of the class of third-wave feminists had become disenchanted with a perception of gains towards equality being overtly tilted to white, middle-class women while minority groups still suffered (Caudwell, 2011). This line of inquiry also notes that oppression does not just come from men but from racism, homophobia, and income inequality that cuts across gender lines and condemns both men and women as contributing to struggles. However, others have argued that such a clear 'break' between second and third-wave feminism is an overtly simplistic and quite possibly inaccurate explanation for the complicated evolution of feminist theory as a whole (Hemmings, 2005).

Feminist viewpoints have often argued that the sport industry ascribes to strict binary gender classification, promoting an intractable sense of male superiority (Shaw, 2006). The feminist goal of equity between the genders has, for decades, been hostilely opposed by a male hegemony resistant to change from the status quo. Messner (2002) notes that male dominance is upheld by a “gender regime of sport,” where these power brokers “maintain and promote male hegemony in sport” (p. 65). In Messner’s eyes, equity between the genders in sport is actively resisted by rigid institutions in sport that stonewall with separate and unequal rules, gaps in funding, and a stark difference in opportunity.

At the same time though, feminist theory’s primary goal of equality has still been felt through policy that has levelled the playing field for sport in general and, specifically, women’s soccer. Worldwide, but especially in North America and Europe, women’s soccer players have benefitted from legislation that has offered up more opportunity, including Title IX in the United States (Caudwell, 2011). Beyond just offering up chances for women as a whole, third-wave feminist goals have also been advanced with efforts to stamp out racism and homophobia within sport and football.

Gender Theory

Gender can be seen as a central facet on feminism and feminist studies (Caudwell, 2011). Caudwell notes that to the regular person, gender often “denotes biological differences between women and men” (p. 331-332). However, Butler (1990) has previously argued that gender is not inscribed on us but socially constructed by performing gender, in effect ‘doing’ masculinity and femininity. Butler (1993) claims that “the regulatory norms of ‘sex’ work in a performative fashion to constitute the materiality of bodies,” through “reiterative and citational practice” (p. 2).

Roth and Basow (2004) claim that "sexed bodies are constructed through the activities we do continually, often without conscious thought" (p. 246). Beyond this construction, however, the differences in masculinity and femininity have been emphasized, with the construction and perpetuation of the former being lauded by the hegemony, while the construction and perpetuation of the latter has been seen as 'lesser' by hegemonic forces. This dichotomy is reflected throughout the building blocks of society on a daily basis.

Many feminists have argued that traditional heteronormative constructions of femininity have only served to perpetuate inequality and denote the bodies of those not conforming as illegitimate (Butler, 1993). These feminists have argued that this framework of heteronormative femininity has been erected by a patriarchally obsessed society, with men in positions of power using popular culture such as movies, television, and the internet to empower a picture of what a 'desirable' woman looks like: young, thin, white, heterosexual, and voluptuous (Gill, 2007). This image is then disseminated daily to the population at large and used to sell products to women now under pressure to 'do' heteronormative femininity with the aid of these products, helping them conform to this pervasive standard as a pathway to success, creating a consumption community (Goldman, 1992).

One area of society that has served as a pedestal to exalt the superiority/inferiority male/female dichotomy is sport (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Bryson (1987) claims that the masculine hegemony underpinning sport has "negative evaluations of women's capacities" deep within it (p.350). Messner (1992) notes that sport has historically been used as a male preserve, where males can bond with each other, friend-to-friend, father-to-son, as well as establish their masculinity and distance themselves from the unwanted stigma of 'being feminine'. The creation

of these ‘female-free zones’ allows men to create affirming identities separate from the looked down upon ‘feminine’ identity (Fields, 2006).

Women who invade the male space of sport may be seen as “deviant” or abnormal and inferior in terms of sport knowledge to men. While more women than ever are participating in sport and entering the industry, these marks of gendered inferiority have been harder to shake, as powerful hegemonic actors seek to keep a status quo that benefits them through privilege and power.

Burstyn (1999) has argued that gendered order has been maintained by men wielding the power at the helm of the sport industry for generations. She argues that many of the main foundational men’s sport leaders “condition and inform the constitution of the gendered social order and its dominant ideology” (p. 22). Threats to this “normative” social order and its ideology are often questioned, ostracized, and purged by those bent on maintaining the status quo and the power that comes with that status quo at the expense of progressive steps towards equality between the genders.

Gender Barriers

Throughout society, male hegemonic forces have worked to establish notions of what is right and proper behavior and attitudes for and about the different genders. Within a sporting context, this includes what types of sport and played by which genders are ‘important’ and worth funding and following. Farrell, Fink, and Fields (2011) found that men are the dominant force in influencing not just these decisions in other men but in women as well. Men’s sport is pictured as the only important sport, to the point that supporting men’s sport feels ‘right’ and the natural thing to do.

These researchers often found that even when engaging in sport spectatorship and fandom with men, women were often treated as the ‘other’, as not at the level of men in their fandom (De Beauvoir, 1972). Men are regarded as “being the sources of knowledge” in terms of sport, no matter the fandom or credentials of women (p. 195). Women are often excluded from conversation about sport by men or have their knowledge of sport marginalized and/or trivialized by their male counterparts. Such attitudes can have a chilling effect for women, who may be as knowledgeable as men about sport, but who may fear reprisals and ridicule for speaking up with their opinions and knowledge.

Besides placing social pressure on women that explicitly and implicitly denote men’s sport as the only important type of sport, men at the levers of power have tried to sweep women’s sport to the margins by not providing media coverage of women’s sports teams and devoting less money towards marketing women’s sports teams. Within the media, ‘sport’ has typically been framed and understood solely as ‘men’s sport’, with women’s sport never being referred to without the gendered language signifier, essentially regarding ‘sport’ as ‘men’s sport’ by default (Blinde, Greendorfer, & Shanker, 1991). When women’s sport has been covered by the media, the breadth and depth of coverage has paled in comparison to men’s sport (Christopherson, Janning, & McConnell, 2002; Duncan & Messner, 1996; Messner, 2002). Much of the narrative beyond the actions of the game itself, so common to the men’s game, are lost in the women’s game (Festle, 1996).

Part of this process of societal construction has enabled the hegemonic patriarchy to establish boundaries of what is and is not proper activities and behaviors in terms of participation in sport for each gender. Such barriers have been erected in soccer, notably in the twentieth century across many continents. The ludicrous rationale given in Germany upon a temporary ban

of women playing the sport was that “The attractiveness of women, their bodies, and souls will suffer irreparable damage and the public display of their bodies will offend morality and decency” (Grainey, 2012, p. 202).

Caudwell (1999) notes that gender frontiers have proven to be “clearly marked, apparently impermeable and prevalent,” while concluding that these frontiers have been “socially and culturally constructed and maintained” (p. 401). Additionally, the above study found that once people, including female soccer players, attempt to cross these constructed boundaries, they are often subject to “stereotyping, prejudice, harassment, and abuse” (p.401).

Feminist Themes

The breadth and depth of feminist themes applicable to sport, and in particular, women’s soccer is quite wide. This study focuses on three main feminist themes as applicable to women’s soccer marketing. These three themes have been prevalent throughout feminist sport literature, as well as having been referred to anecdotally at great length in previous coverage of women’s soccer globally. First, the inequity of rules, resources, and coverage between women’s soccer and male sport. Women’s sport has always faced an uphill climb to stand on equal ground with men’s sport in the key areas listed above. Funding at youth and college levels lagged before Title IX (Overman & Sagert, 2012), while media coverage has been sparse until the past decade, with what media coverage that has happened often marginalizing the accomplishments of the competing athletes in comparison to their male counterparts (Kane & Greendorfer, 1994).

Secondly, this study examines the hegemony’s embracing Motherhood, family values, and role models while shunning the ‘Other’. Historically with many women’s sports, the target audience has been young and female, with players expected to serve as role models and uphold middle-American, ‘traditional values’, including motherhood and the notion of a ‘normal’ set of

heterosexual, family values (Christopherson et al., 2002; Sugden, 1994). Until recently, this archetype has gone unchallenged, with those deviating from the norm, including those who identified as LGBT, shunned and ostracized (Longman, 2001).

Finally, the theme of the development and perpetuation of an ideal heteronormative femininity & a consumption community is examined. As corporate America has realised that the marketing products towards women is a must for sustained viability, companies have increasingly touted certain products as a way to ascribe or 'do' the desirable role of heteronormative femininity (Goldman, 1992; McCaughey, 1997). In many cases, the products are being pitched by female athletes, clubs, and sport leagues. Additionally, in an effort to capture the male 'gaze', some involved in women's sport have used sexuality to try and sell their own product, sparking fierce debate in the process (Ain, 2013; Holste, 2002). Combined, the author posits that studying these three specific themes within a professional women's soccer context can help develop a greater understanding of marketing through feminist themes in professional women's soccer as a whole.

Inequity of Rules, Resources, and Coverage

While much has been made, mostly in the press, of the inequities between male and female sport on multiple levels, little formal investigation has been done in terms of these differences regarding women's soccer. Though attempts have been made to detail the challenges faced by the women's game globally, such attempts within the United States have largely lumped women's soccer in with the travails of other women's sport without examining the unique context of women's soccer in this nation that leads to unique challenges confronted by practitioners.

Tacitly, social barriers were erected to separate women from sport, disenfranchising them, while men were glamorized instead of ostracized. De Varona (2004) identified some common myths used as barriers to participation in sport: (a) participating in sport will make women unfeminine, (b) participating in elite sport will harm women's reproductive organs and will result in the inability to produce children, (c) women do not need to learn about the lessons of life on the playing fields of sport, but men do; (d) women will never be accepted as real athletes, because they are not as strong, fast, and muscular as men are; (e) women athletes will never be as popular as male athletes; therefore, they will not attract audiences large enough to make women's sport financially profitable and viable; and (f) women are not as interested in sport as men are; therefore, opportunities should not be wasted on them.

Participation in sports at youth and college levels by young girls skyrocketed as many of the above myths concerning female participation in sports were debunked. In particular, De Varona (2004), among others, found that women's participation in sport had many positive side effects attached to it:

1. Girls and women who participate in sport are less likely to abuse drugs, suffer from depression, and/or engage in self-destructive behavior.
2. Girls and women who participate in sport are more likely to complete high school studies and strive for higher education.
3. Women who compete in sport are more likely to lead productive and successful lives.
4. Women who exercise are less likely to suffer from osteoporosis and cancer. (p. 9-10)

The profligation of these facts has helped depower many of the myths that had kept women from the game, going some way in bridging the participation gap between boys and girls which had developed as a consequence of those myths.

In the United States, gradual growth in women's sport had been the name of the game for the better part of a century until the advent of Title IX of the Education Amendments Act, the educational law requiring equity in athletics and all other programs that received federal funds, which changed the game forever by increasing opportunities for women exponentially once passed in 1972 (De Varona, 2004; Ladda, 2000; Overman & Sagert, 2012). Initially designed to allow women better opportunities for professional careers in fields such as law and medicine, it would also provide a whole new world of opportunities for women in athletics, as schools had to adjust their budgets to fit the ratio of male and female athletes in their athletic programs (Grainey, 2012).

Despite the growth of women's sport thanks to Title IX, as a whole, recruiting expenses still pale in comparison to what has been devoted to male sports, with seventy percent of such expenses being earmarked for men's college sports (Longman, 2001). According to the Women's Sports Foundation, as a whole, the gap between money spent on women's and men's college sports still lingers at one hundred eighty million dollars in favor of the men. Though compensation for coaches at big schools is strong, parity has not been achieved however, as coaches at smaller or even mid-range Division I schools may need part-time club coaching jobs to supplement their income

There have been arguments that media coverage of women's sports, the watershed 1999 Women's World Cup included, have relied on a "highly stereotypical feminized view, one that tends to sexualize, commodify, trivialize, and devalue (through marginalization) women's sporting accomplishments" (Kane & Greendorfer, 1994, p. 36). Some have claimed that the media sexualizes female athletes, emphasizing physical and sexual differences from men and downplaying actual accomplishments on the field of play (Duncan, 1990; Duncan & Messner,

1996, 2000; Jones, Murrell, & Jackson, 1999). A study of the coverage of the 1999 Women's World Cup found that reporters "actively promoted, constructed or perpetuated certain gender ideologies, which contributed to the popularity of the event" (Christopherson et al., 2002, p. 178).

Embracing Motherhood, Family Values, and Role Models while Shunning The "Other"

While sociological factors propping up the rise in popularity of youth soccer as a whole in the United States as well as in the popularity of the USWNT has been written about in great length, recent changes to the narrative have gone largely unexamined within professional women's soccer. Whereas previous authors (e.g. Knoppers & Anthonissen, 2004; Martinez, 2008) have noted how 'middle America' ideals have been cherished in soccer circles in America, they have also noted how behavior deviating from a traditionally feminine, heterosexual norm has been shunned, ignored, and ostracized. Recently however, homophobia has been confronted and countered by many within women's soccer, both through players, officials, and fans. These new steps have gone largely ignored in research, with this study seeking to build on previous narratives with these new developments.

Sugden (1994) argues that a focus on women's soccer appeals to an interested white middle class that has made the sport a prestigious one at youth and intercollegiate levels. Martinez (2008) counters that American women's professional soccer has "transcended its early affiliation with ethnicity and class and has succeeded at a global level," (p. 239) while arguing that the success of women in the sport may undermine male participation due to perceived notions of women's triumphs in the sport indicating soccer "must not be tough enough to qualify as a true test of American masculinity" (p. 239).

Support for women's soccer has long been underpinned by an ethos of its players being "proper" role models for younger girls who are paragons of "family values" as determined by the hegemony. Events occurring outside of this narrative have often been scrutinized, often obsessively and grossly out of proportion to the incident. A Pakistan newspaper dubbed its country's first women's national tournament as a 'catfight' after an on-field incident that mirrored what often happens at men's games regularly. (Grainey, 2012).

Homophobia - globally & beyond. Deviance from the 'norm' of heterosexuality has historically been met with a backlash from those in power. Homophobia has been described as a powerful political weapon of sexism, with the label of being a lesbian used as a marker to "define the boundaries of acceptable female behavior in a patriarchal culture" (Griffin, 2002, p. 194; Pharr, 1988). Those who admitted homosexuality and who refused to conform to those boundaries saw endorsement opportunities vanish (Longman, 2001). Festle (1996) claims that male sexuality in sport goes unexamined as sport confirms their masculinity, but that sport calls into question women's 'heterosexual femininity'.

Kane and Lenskyj (1996) argue that "homophobic representations of female athletes, most notably the symbolic erasure of women who participate in sports traditionally considered a male preserve, play a central role in perpetuating male sporting hegemony" (p. 200). Being called a lesbian, especially in sport, has been seen as being the victim of an act of intimidation, with some women in sport feeling sensitive and vulnerable to the use of the term, as much of women's sport has been stereotyped as a 'lesbian activity' in the eyes of many (Grainey, 2012).

The specter of homophobia still lingered over women's soccer in the U.S. despite its growing popularity. Some claimed that the necessity of presenting women athletes as heterosexual had little to do with soccer and more to do with a prevailing air of homophobia

permeating much of American sport (Griffin, 1998; Hargreaves, 2000; Knoppers & Anthonissen, 2003). For much of the twentieth century, sports figures have denied the existence of lesbianism by underlining heterosexual normality, specifically the existence of motherhood, boyfriends, husbands, and babies (Longman, 2001).

Marketing and media coverage of the USWNT diverged away from any possible implications of homosexuality, using sex appeal to promote women's empowerment and in being good role models (Christopherson, Janning, & McConnell, 2002). Such decisions were also undertaken in the general promotion of the 1999 Women's World Cup. In western cultures, hairstyle and length still act as a significant marker of gender, with longer hair usually thought to denote a heteronormative female (Haug, 1999). It's been theorized by some that with men and women's players wearing the same equipment to play, unlike in some other sports, women have relied on their hair to identify themselves as women and "to avoid being mistaken for men," with hair length and style also sometimes being thought of as a code for sexuality (Cox & Thompson, 2004, p. 14).

Ideal Heteronormative Femininity and a Consumption Community

Much has been made in academia and beyond of the construction of an ideal heteronormative feminine identity by the hegemony. In large part, this construction has served the needs of corporate interests, allowing for the shaping and manipulation of purchasing habits as women seek to conform to this notion of ideal heteronormative femininity. Sport and other entertainment avenues have been eager and active participants in the construction of this 'consumption community', with entities often eagerly accepting an exchange of cash or other considerations for access to lucrative consumer markets. Women's soccer has been no different in this regard, with its purveyors and participants often pushed as or encouraged to function as

the ideal heteronormatively feminine role model to be aspired towards. However, as other identities apart from this ideal have grown to be more acceptable in women's soccer, research into how professional clubs have adapted in marketing to the growing diversity of these identities has lagged. This study seeks to fill some of those gaps in the development in marketing strategies based around those newly emerging identities.

Ideal masculinity is constructed through ideals of physical strength, large, hulking stature, and through aggression. By contrast, feminine ideals are seen as being "beautiful, small, thin, and, perhaps most importantly weak" (Roth & Basow, 2004, p. 249). To meet this ideal, women often diet, exercise, remove hair, and use make-up (Bartky, 1998). Masculine and feminine ideals are transmitted through family, religion, the workplace, and the media to the point that being 'feminine' or 'masculine' becomes a key for the identity of women and men (Bartky, 1998; Roth & Basow, 2004).

Wolf (1991) argues that women (and men) are encouraged to look certain ways because meeting the masculine and feminine ideals of society at large takes money used to purchase products and use services. McCaughey (1997) claims that sport may be a way of fueling capitalist needs by selling products to new markets and not as a tool of liberation for repressed groups. Goldman (1992) refers to this as 'commodity feminism', with advertisers using visual touches to make distinct styles that allow women and men to 'do' feminism and masculinity as they please.

Women's soccer stars, most notably Mia Hamm, have endured a complex relationship with advertisers from a sociological perspective. While Hamm was being seen as a symbol of progress in some eyes, she was also still promoting products like 'Soccer Barbie', which University of California sociology professor Harry Edwards argued was a sign that "women are

still not taken seriously as athletes unless they conform to safe, unthreatening family-girl images and eliminate as much as possible any masculine or lesbian proclivities,” (Longman, 2011, p. 98) claiming that the Barbie doll was “the quintessential sexist symbol in Western society” (p. 98).

Female team sports have often taken a backseat to the trials and tribulations of the teenagers participating in gymnastics and figure skating, sports that emphasize more “traditional” aspects of femininity, like “grace, balance, and aesthetics” (Christopherson et al., 2002, p.172; Coakley, 2009; Daddario, 1997). Joan Ryan (1996) dubbed it a phenomena known as ‘little girls in pretty boxes,’ an obsession over girls whose fame rises and dissipates in their teenage years.

Despite the destruction of many myths, Carl Cannon claimed that people expect women to play competitive sports like men but still “retain some of the traditional notions of femininity,” in the process (Grainey, 2012, p. 174). To conform to societal norms, women athletes must be ‘both strong and soft,’ to negotiate the dichotomy of strong athlete and patriarchal definitions of femininity (Hargreaves, 1986; Markula, 1995). In effect, women athletes must play the sport like men with power and tenacity, but also retain their femininity to be acceptable to the hegemonic forces in power (Christopherson et al., 2002).

While some companies’ devotion towards promotion of women’s sport and advertisement targeting women has been commendable, others have ascribed a more nefarious motive towards said efforts. Instead of breaking through patriarchal gender norms, critics like Goldman (1992) have argued that giant conglomerates such as Nike are merely interested in the bottom line, namely increasing their profits. The media has often shown favor towards physically attractive athletes regardless of skill, emphasizing and exploiting heteronormative femininity at will (Grau, Roselli, & Taylor, 2007; Spencer & McClung, 2001).

Advertisements have typically played into heteronormative ideals of femininity, including ‘traditional’ heterosexual roles for women while also targeting selling products for women with female athlete endorsers (Blinde et al., 1991; Cuneen, 2001; Cuneen & Claussen, 1999; Cuneen & Sidwell, 1998; Cuneen & Spencer, 2003; Goffman, 1976; Jones et al., 1999; Lumpkin, 2007; Lumpkin & Williams, 1991, Lynn, Walsdorf, Hardin, & Hardin, 2002; McGinnis, Chun, & McQuillan, 2003). Sports that emphasize traditional femininity such as ice skating and gymnastics, have often been most popular with marketers in the past (Duncan & Hasbrook, 1988; Kane, 1988, 1999; McGinnis et al., 2003). Sports like these have been used as breeding grounds for conventional notions of femininity such as passivity and a ‘nurturing manor’ (Cuneen & Sidwell, 1998; Duncan & Sayaovong, 1989; Rintala & Birrell, 1984).

Ads featuring females often focus on attractiveness, with a study by Grau et al. (2007) indicating that 81% of ads featuring women athletes focused on attractiveness of the endorser. Some critics argue that empowerment can arise from women using attractiveness to sell products, with women taking advantage of their own endorsement potential, a view echoed by many athletes themselves (Ross, Ridinger, & Cuneen, 2009). Women athletes claim to critics of using attractiveness to sell products that they have spent years working on their body, gaining confidence in the process (Longman, 2001).

Wellesley College’s Laura Pappano argued that in an era when female athletes fight for their bodies to “denote strength, power, and skill,” by contrast, posing for risque photo shoots, including the nude calendar for Australian women’s soccer, is a ‘corruption’ of those ideals (Grainey, 2012, p. 165). Such criticism has not stopped powerful male figures in the sport to push pandering to male audiences with suggestions like Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) president Sepp Blatter’s infamous utterances that women should dress in

sexier outfits to attract male audiences or Ex-UEFA head Lennart Johansson's similar comments. Such comments have only served to deemphasize athletic capabilities of women athletes while pushing a narrative of traditional femininity and sex appeal being the only thing that can attract coveted male viewership. Pappano posited that using sex to sell the game "undercuts their legitimacy as serious athletes," and does little to grow the game or any sense of gender equity (Grainey, 2012, p. 172).

Women's sports leagues who 'hyper-sexualize' athletes to attempt to draw in consumers have been ridiculed in the past (Holste, 2002; Parker, 2002; Wilstein, 2002). In the cutthroat world of women's professional sports, alienating any part of a potential fanbase bears potentially catastrophic consequences. By contrast, studies show that females have responded positively to skilled and independent portrayals in ads (Bartos, 1989; Fink, Cunningham, & Kensicki, 2004; Levin, 1990; Sutton & Watlington, 1994).

Summary

As evidenced above, feminist themes have dominated the way women's sport has been marketed and presented for the better part of a century, for better or for worse. This has been readily apparent in the selling of women's soccer, as the sport has negotiated numerous highs and lows over the past few decades with numerous feminist themes looming large over the marketing of the sport at every turn. Inequality in resources and coverage has dogged women's soccer at all levels in all countries, while the sport has been shoehorned into a 'family entertainment' niche, with those deviating from a role model archetype, be it through sexuality or other traits being marginalized. At the same time, players have often felt pressure to 'prove' their heterosexuality and heterofemininity to a broad audience to both increase attention for their sport from the public at large and to attract sponsor dollars.

Far from waning in influence, these themes have continued to dominate the discussion on the marketing of women's soccer in the United States to this day, even as those themes have evolved with time. While women's soccer clubs and leagues have approached the gap in funding and coverage between their sport and men's soccer in more pragmatic terms than in the past, that gap is still pronounced, with massive effects on marketing practices. Women's soccer is still presented as 'wholesome' entertainment, but appeals to those interested in the sport as pure competition as well as those in the LGBT community have accelerated. Additionally, attitudes towards both overt 'displays' of heteronormative femininity and the sexuality of players has softened, with revealing pictorials largely ignored and lesbian players tolerated and celebrated by a diverse fan base.

Yet despite wide swaths of anecdotal evidence confirming the above, systematic investigation into such feminist themes and their effect on the marketing of women's soccer in the United States have been almost non-existent for the last decade. With the above themes playing such a vital role into the continued operation and slow growth of women's soccer in the United States, such an oversight is surprising. Therefore, this dissertation seeks to eliminate this oversight by conducting a systematic analysis of the marketing of professional women's soccer in the United States through a set of feminist themes that have proven vitally important in women's sport and women's soccer in the past.

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CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to examine the various marketing perspectives of professional women's soccer through themes of feminism. To satisfy the objectives of the study, a historical review of the marketing of American women's soccer, as well as the marketing of the current professional women's soccer league in the United States, the National Women's Soccer League (NWSL), was conducted. Additionally, a case study (Eisenhardt, 1989; Yin, 2013) involving interviews of marketing officials of the NWSL of their experiences in marketing professional women's soccer was conducted to analyze their perspectives and experiences in dealing with the following feminist issues: (a) the inequity of rules, resources, and coverage between women's soccer and male sports, (b) the hegemony's embracing motherhood, family values, and role models while shunning the 'other' in women's soccer and how these circumstances are being challenged, and (c) the development and perpetuation of an ideal heteronormative femininity and a consumption community and how these identities are being challenged and changed.

The parameters for this research study are as follows: This is a study of professional women's soccer clubs within the United States. Data was collected from the only professional women's soccer league in the U.S., the NWSL, and its nine member clubs. Specifically, the archival material gathered was from the league and all of its member clubs, while interviews were conducted with marketing managers of five of the nine clubs within the NWSL.

The following paragraphs describe the research context in which the case study interviews were conducted and details of the methods that were carried out in the study, including reviewing the format of the case study, how data was gathered, and how data was analyzed. My theoretical background as a critical realist and feminist theorist has influenced the choice of my methods for this study, and as such, I have summarized this perspective and how it impacted this research in Appendix A.

Research Context

The following paragraphs function as a short background on the National Women's Soccer League (NWSL), the entity that this study proposes to examine.

NWSL. Due to the failures of the Women's United Soccer Association (WUSA) and Women's Professional Soccer (WPS) after three seasons of operation each, efforts for a third professional women's soccer league in the United States began in earnest in the second half of 2012. While rumors of the establishment of a new league gained traction during the 2012 Summer Olympics, details were not finalized until late in the year and early in 2013. The NWSL would be structured in a different way than its two failed predecessors, taking on the franchise structure that WPS had embraced but also changing the way top players' salaries were paid in drastic fashion. The soccer federations of the United States, Canada, and Mexico agreed to subsidize NWSL clubs for the salaries of top players, theoretically taking an enormous financial burden off the teams, who had previously struggled under the heavy monetary weight of these salaries in previous leagues.

As such, overall team salaries were cut to a fraction of that of previous leagues, to the point that some of the lesser players on the roster were making around \$6,000 for six months of work, with some taking side jobs during the season to make ends meet. Despite this cold reality,

eight clubs agreed to take part in the first season of the NWSL in 2013: Chicago, Boston, Western New York, and Sky Blue FC from New Jersey (all holdovers from WPS), along with franchises in Washington D.C. (making the step up from the amateur W-League), Portland (run by the city's Major League Soccer franchise), as well as brand new franchises in Seattle and Kansas City. While the Portland franchise played in the spacious Providence Park used by the Major League Soccer franchise, other clubs budgeted conservatively, playing in smaller stadiums, some used by high schools or colleges, often scarred by football lines or running tracks and beholden to artificial turf.

Compared to the chaos of the final season of WPS in 2011, the NWSL's inaugural season was a fairly docile and smooth running affair. Attendance in Portland was astonishing for a women's club team, with the Thorns averaging 13,320 fans, although attendance for other clubs fluctuated greatly, bottoming out at 1,677 fans per match for New Jersey based Sky Blue FC (Gehrke, 2014). Traditional media coverage was largely absent and a vibrant social media network tried to fill the gaps, with clubs themselves using social media as a key marketing tool. With no television deal for much of the season and a very limited one late in the season, most games were available exclusively through internet streaming, the quality of which varied greatly. Following Portland's win in the playoff final, the league saw a fairly stable offseason that confirmed all eight teams would return for 2014, bringing unheard of stability to a professional women's league in America for the first time in years. Additionally, the league welcomed an expansion club from Houston, representing the second club run by a MLS franchise, and another important step forward with the league gladly accepting a club with great resources to the fold for its second season.

Case study. This dissertation uses a single case study with multiple settings, which allows researchers to look at various perspectives and instances, providing opportunities for analysis and insight into specific issues (Denscombe, 1998; Yin, 2013). Case studies not only allow for the gathering and analysing detailed information on a subject but also allow a researcher to hone in on relationships pertinent to the goals of this research project, such as the relationship between marketing officials of a team and their core audience. Interviews through case studies also made it easier to analyze and interpret unforeseen events, as well as smaller, more focused research projects where researchers aim to study a limited number of cases (Denscombe, 1998; Yin, 2013).

Setting selection. The case study for this research project focused on the NWSL. Specifically, this study sought to interview marketing officials at NWSL clubs of varying size and scope to analyze both the use of feminist themes in the development and implementation of marketing plans for these clubs, as well as the impact of the implementation of these themes on the practice of marketing for women's soccer. The NWSL was selected for its status as a fully professional women's soccer league, one of the very few in existence in the world, in addition to being an American venture, considering the nation's storied history and popular support of women's soccer in comparison to other nations.

Additionally, as evidenced by the research into U.S. women's soccer's relationship with feminist themes through the years, the exact nature of these relationships are still shifting and evolving and far from settled. In many ways, the NWSL has broken with past precedents in their dealings with feminist themes in their marketing, making it an intriguing entity worth studying. The NWSL's status as a nascent league in its second year of existence allowed the researcher to examine marketing strategies in a niche between newly formed (at the outset of the year) and

those that may be well entrenched from a club/league that has existed for generations. Also, the NWSL contains clubs of varying resources, philosophies, and histories, likely more unique than other comparable professional leagues. Studying multiple clubs of differing means and methods allowed the researcher to examine the greatest variety of marketing strategies and techniques in an effort to draw out the most successful of these strategies and techniques to provide a blueprint for best using feminist themes in marketing campaigns, regardless of resource level. The researcher had to have had a realistic chance at access to the chosen organization's marketing officials for case study interviews. Since the proposed target of data collection is within the researcher's home country, and the primary researcher has had previous positive contact in a professional setting with the proposed targets of data collection, these aims were realistic within the timeframe outlined in this investigation.

The following paragraphs outline the specific clubs in the NWSL from whom data were gathered. The five clubs selected represent a plurality of the nine current member clubs of the NWSL, as well as a representative cross-section of the various differing attributes of the league's clubs. Boston, Chicago, and Sky Blue FC represent clubs who have participated in multiple professional women's soccer leagues, while Portland and FC Kansas City emerged from the ground up for the NWSL. Portland and FC Kansas City are part of a larger soccer conglomerate, while the other three clubs deal solely in women's soccer. Additionally, Portland is one of two clubs operating under the purview of a Major League Soccer franchise. Finally, both bigger markets (Boston and Chicago) and smaller markets (Sky Blue FC [New Jersey], Portland, and FC Kansas City) are represented in this selection of interview settings. The selection of these five clubs allowed the researcher to assemble a sample representative of the league's full complement of nine clubs, each with its own unique attributes that are represented in the sample.

Case study setting 1: Boston Breakers. The Boston Breakers were established in 2001 to join the WUSA, the first American professional women's soccer league, and the club is the only franchise to have taken part in every professional women's soccer season, encompassing three different leagues, including the NWSL. Additionally, the Breakers survived through the hiatus period between leagues by playing in semi-professional leagues, often as one of the few teams paying players at the time. The Breakers uniquely run an academy system similar to that of Major League Soccer clubs and more notably, soccer clubs around the world, operating youth clubs in the New England region and clubs for college age players in semi-professional second tier leagues. The Breakers are currently managed by Michael Stoller, also a managing partner of BCL Premier Sports, an athletic facility design company. Boston was one of the few NWSL clubs with a major, recognizable shirt sponsor in 2013, fruit juice company Ocean Spray, though this deal was not renewed for 2014. The Breakers currently play at Harvard Stadium, used by Harvard Football in the fall.

Case study setting 2: Chicago Red Stars. The Chicago Red Stars were established in 2009 as a founding member of WPS following the demise of WUSA years earlier. Unlike many of their brethren, the Red Stars played at a truly professional stadium, Toyota Park, which housed the city's Major League Soccer team. However, they did so only as tenants, and the expense of the rent paid for the use of the facility was a major contributing factor in the club dropping out of the professional WPS and into the semi-professional WPSL in 2011. The Red Stars would rejoin the top tier of professional women's soccer in 2013 as a founding member of the NWSL, playing their games at Benedictine College in a much smaller facility than in their WPS days. The Chicago team is owned most notably by Arnim Whistler, also an owner of regional home designer/builder Exquisite Homes. The Red Stars have put a focus on local player

development and promoting from within for staffing, both in an effort at cost control, with the club not having the resources of some of the NWSL's bigger clubs.

Case study setting 3: FC Kansas City. FC Kansas City was one of two franchises, along with the Seattle Reign, that were founding members of the NWSL that were built from the ground up ahead of the league's inaugural 2013 season. The managing group that operated FC Kansas City was not foreign to soccer on a smaller scale. The group, Top of The Arc, LLC, runs the Major Indoor Soccer League's Missouri Comets as well as the Kansas City Soccer Dome, an indoor soccer facility in Kansas City. As such, the two clubs share much of the same staff, including head coach Vlatko Andonovski. The franchise was well attended in Overland Park, Kansas in its first season but moved to a smaller venue for 2014, on the campus of the University of Missouri-Kansas City. Despite lacking the resources of some other clubs, FCKC has often been at the forefront of sponsorship deals in the league, signing Toshiba as a minor shirt sponsor in 2014, as well as a stadium naming rights deal in the club's second season of operation.

Case study setting 4: Portland Thorns FC. After much debate as to when a Major League Soccer franchise would fully back a professional women's side after much discussion for over a decade, the Portland Timbers franchise became the first to do so upon the establishment of the NWSL in 2013. The women's side took the name of the 'Thorns' after a sponsorship conflict between MLS supplier Adidas and NWSL supplier Nike meant the club could not brand the women's side as the Timbers. As was the case with the Houston Dash after them, Portland's women's club used much of the same staff working for the Timbers to create the appearance of a professional, organized product that some of the other clubs could not match with more limited resources. The Thorns (and Timbers) are owned and operated by Peregrine Sports LLC, an entity operated in large part by outspoken and polarizing figure Merritt Paulson, scion of Goldman

Sachs banker Hank Paulson. Portland plays in the Timbers' MLS stadium, Providence Park, and is easily the best supported franchise in terms of attendance in the NWSL, averaging 13,320 fans in 2013, shattering previous records in a professional women's soccer league in the U.S (Gehrke, 2014).

Case study setting 5: Sky Blue FC. Sky Blue FC was one of four WPS members to join together with four other clubs to form the NWSL in 2013. The New Jersey outfit was also a founding member of WPS and won the title in the league's first season in 2009 in extraordinary fashion after having dispensed with two managers over the course of the season. Unlike their other WPS brethren, Sky Blue FC did not continue play at a lower level once WPS folded early in 2012, getting together for an overseas tour of Japan but otherwise staying dormant through the year. Owned by a group of individuals including Steven Temares, CEO of Bed, Bath, and Beyond, SBFC were linked with a potential partnership with MLS side Red Bull New York in the offseason after the 2013 campaign, though talks proved futile. Attendance, once over thirty-five hundred patrons on average in 2009 in WPS has sunk steadily, with just over sixteen hundred fans on average in 2013. Early attendance in 2014 has been particularly frightening, with the club coming up short of a thousand spectators on multiple occasions, putting the club's long-term future in doubt.

Data Collection

Case study data are usually collected through interviews and gathering information from archived documents (Yin, 2013). In this study, the interviews were conducted with marketing officials of each NWSL team. In terms of archival material, although much of the league's financial records have been kept as private proprietary information withheld from the public, other written and electronic media, such as print advertisements, electronic advertisements,

social media content, as well as third-party media coverage and information on the clubs in question were gathered for analyses and triangulation. Triangulation uses multiple data sources within a study to help corroborate findings and ensure the ‘picture’ produced from the data is robust and comprehensive (Patton, 2002). The archival material and interviews complimented each other as information sources and reinforced each other as well as resolved questions about the data. Using multiple sources of data allows for more developed case studies and enables the researcher to triangulate gathered data in an effort to build trustworthiness (Guba, 1981).

Archival material. Archival material usually consists of print documents, such as third-party newspaper articles and clippings, official team press releases, and other media articles and team advertising material (Yin, 2013). For the purposes of this study, dealing with an entity that does much of its business through electronic media channels, the collection and analysis of online press releases, third-party news coverage, and social media advertising campaigns was also useful. Some advantages of collecting and using archival material in studies such as these include their preciseness, how broadly they can cover a subject being studied, and the ability to examine such documents multiple times for in-depth analysis (Yin, 2013).

For the current research study, encompassing the historical analysis of marketing of American women’s soccer and the case studies, the archival material consisted of both printed and electronic materials. Some of the printed material examined included newspaper clippings, printed advertisement copy, and official press release, rules, and regulatory information released by the clubs of the NWSL and the league itself. Some of the electronic materials examined included online third-party news articles about the teams and the league, official team and league press releases distributed electronically, official website material, and social media artifacts

(Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, etc.). Any print material needing to be converted to electronic copy via scanner was done by the researcher.

Specifically, this study gathered the following amounts of archival material: three newspaper clippings totaling seven pages, five pieces of printed advertisement copy/game programs totaling roughly 12 pages, and one four-page league release with the rules and regulations for the 2014 NWSL season. In terms of electronic print material gathered, 53 third-party online articles totaling roughly 89 pages; 71 official team and league press releases totaling 82 pages; and three snapshots each of the nine clubs' website and NWSL homepage were gathered. Finally, in terms of social media artifacts, the researcher also saved 200 tweets, 60 Instagram photos, and 18 Facebook posts.

Interviews. Interviews are also crucial in the process of building a case study. In case studies, interviews allow the researcher to gain direct perspective into the research subject matter from the perspectives of those directly involved (Yin, 2013). This study used the transcription and content analysis guidelines set forth by Denscombe (1998). The interview guide used in the different case study settings was developed through the literature review, archival material collected, and the theoretical framework developed by the researcher for this study. The interview guide, developed through the formation of the theoretical framework, is provided in Appendix B.

Targeted interview subjects were marketing officials of the NWSL clubs selected as case study settings for this study. Five interviews were conducted and took between 23 and 95 minutes each. A further breakdown of the statistics for each interview is provided in Appendix C. The study limited interviews to team marketing officials identified and contacted through

publicly available information on team websites or through suitable officials the researcher was directed to by other team officials.

Interviews with representatives at each case study setting focused on the three key prongs of the framework established earlier by the researcher, specifically: (a) the inequity of rules, resources, and coverage between women's soccer and male sport, (b) the hegemony's embracing motherhood, family values, and role models while shunning the "other" in women's soccer and how these circumstances are being challenged, and (c) the development and perpetuation of an ideal heteronormative femininity and a consumption community and how these identities are being challenged and changed. The researcher made contact with the prospective interviewees and/or the organization of the case study setting. Potential interview subjects were identified through publicly available information on club and league websites and/or through the researcher's women's soccer media contacts.

After initial contact and an explanation of the scope and purpose of the study, the researcher arranged a suitable time for the interview with the interview subject. All five interviews were over the telephone to suit the desire and needs of both the researcher and the interview subjects. While face-to-face interviews are most desirable in that they help build trust and make conversation between two parties easier, financial and logistic concerns dictated that interviews be conducted over the phone (Rubin & Rubin, 2004).

Following initial arrangements between the researcher and the interview subject, a formal information letter providing detail as to the procedures and scope of the project and a consent form approved by the University of Georgia's Institutional Review Board were provided to the interview subjects (see Appendices D and E). The researcher provided multiple copies of the above documents to each participant, with one signed copy being kept by both the interview

participant for personal reference and the researcher in maintaining records for this study.

Participants were e-mailed the above documents as necessary and were provided instructions on providing an electronic signed copy to return to the researcher before the commencement of the interview session.

In addition to providing written consent, participants were asked verbally if they consent with the interview being recorded at the beginning of the interview process. Phone interviews were conducted through speakerphone to enable the recording of the interviews. The researcher used both a laptop computer capable of capturing audio as a primary means of recording the interviews while using a handheld digital audio recorder as a backup method of recording the interview for the sake of redundancy.

Data Analysis

The researcher conducted content analysis using the qualitative data analysis software ATLAS.ti 7.0 on the interviews conducted at each case study setting and site, as well as with the gathered archival material. The ATLAS.ti 7.0 program allows researchers to code and retrieve collected data by allowing for the highlighting of emerging themes in the data, in this case the transcribed interviews, allowing for the data artifacts collected as archival material (Frieze, 2014).

As data from interviews and archival materials were collected, it was inductively and deductively analyzed through the guidelines established by Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2013) and Yin (2013), as well as through the constant comparison protocol devised by Glaser and Strauss (1967). Content analysis allows the researcher to code data based on prior knowledge, such as the established literature and other material used to develop the theoretical framework underpinning this study. Additionally, content analysis allows the researcher to

review and analyze large amounts of textual data such as interviews and written archival materials while systematically organizing and interpreting the properties of said data, such as the frequencies of words and themes (Denscombe, 1998).

This approach in methodology helped the researcher in the data analyses by easing the process of theme identification from the data gathered through interviews and the gathering of archival materials. The researcher began the content analysis through a process of open coding, using some of the terminology and themes gathered from the literature review to help begin the process of grouping and categorizing gathered data. Data were coded as simply and succinctly as possible without losing meaning or context, using short, descriptive phrases as codes. Following the process of open coding, the researcher engaged in axial coding to examine relationships and trends that may have risen to the surface after open coding (Corley & Gioia, 2004; Leopkey & Parent, 2009). An example of some of the open codes used included: ‘new/social media initiatives’, ‘fight for media recognition’, and ‘developing media relationships’, which combine towards an axial code of ‘utilizing creative methods to garner meaningful media coverage’. This evolving process of coding helped provide more nuanced analysis of the data, enabling a more precise picture of the findings and how they are related to the proposed theoretical framework. For the sake of consistency, the researcher used the constant comparison techniques set out by Glaser and Strauss (1967), comparing the already gathered literature, the archival materials collected, and the interview data.

Initial data analyses focused on the collected archival materials, specifically the print and electronic artifacts gathered by the researcher in relation to both the nine NWSL clubs serving as case study settings, as well as the league itself. Some of the print documents examined included newspaper and magazine clippings detailing the league and its clubs and more specifically, its

marketing activities, as well as any physical press releases sent out by the clubs and league, along with other artifacts such as printed team media guides that may touch on marketing through some of the feminist themes established through this study's literature review and framework construction. Financial information regarding the clubs and league has usually been regarded as proprietary information and not released to the public as league policy, and the researcher was unable to procure official financial documentation despite requests.

Some of the electronic artifacts examined included electronic press releases from the league and clubs, electronic news articles from third-parties, and social media activities (Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, etc.), a medium that has grown increasingly important for clubs as they try to reach a niche audience. Team and league produced audiovisual content such as YouTube video broadcasts of matches, interviews, and creative features were also examined in this study. As is the case with the print artifacts listed above, these electronic artifacts were coded and analyzed in an attempt to identify patterns and trends in the clubs' marketing through the use of the specific tenets of feminist themes outlined in the study's theoretical framework. Further analyses focused on the interviews with the NWSL club marketing officials. As aforementioned, through the transcribed interviews the researcher examined patterns and trends in the clubs' marketing strategies and practices using feminist themes outlined in the proposed theoretical framework.

The researcher focused on developing case descriptions for each case study setting in regards to the strategy and practices of marketing product through the use of the specific feminist themes earmarked in the researcher's theoretical framework. At this point, the researcher utilized a cross-case analysis to compare and contrast emergent themes between the different cases to see how different clubs utilize similar or different strategies and practices in their marketing through

the feminist themes outlined previously (Yin, 2013). Open coding of the collected archival material and of the transcribed interviews brought to light marketing practices and strategies of each NWSL club, as well as challenges faced, historical perspectives and contexts, and potential avenues towards future development in a marketing sense for each club. Following open coding, a process of axial coding aided in the search for patterns between the recorded open codes. Finally, higher order coding was used to further examine the case study findings at each case study setting site.

After the collection of artifacts and the completion of five interviews, the researcher considered having reached data saturation. Saturation is defined as the point where newly collected data no longer increases the understanding of the concepts being examined by the researcher (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). For the purpose of establishing trustworthiness of the qualitative data, integral to any research study, the ATLAS.ti 7.0 software was used to manage archival materials, contacts, and interview data (Guba, 1981; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Research Quality

Trustworthiness, noted by Guba (1981) as a study's credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, is paramount for the quality of any research study. Credibility speaks to how believable one's research results are. Transferability is how generalizable research results are to other contexts or to theory. Dependability of research focuses on how well certain research can be applied to changes in context. Confirmability can also be thought of as replicability, or if others can replicate the findings from a research project given the same data. In regards to this study, the use of triangulation through multiple sources of information, specifically archival material and interviews, along with interviewees reviewing transcripts to clear up any potential mix-ups in comprehension added to the trustworthiness of this research.

Additional steps undertaken to ensure trustworthiness in this case included the availability of interview transcripts to be reviewed by interviewees, detailed documentation of procedures, and a continual process of peer review (Yin, 2013).

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CHAPTER 4
ARTICLE #1 – THE HISTORY OF
WOMEN’S SOCCER MARKETING IN THE UNITED STATES

The global growth of women’s soccer has been unprecedented since the turn of the century, with the progress being nothing short of amazing considering many countries, including current women’s soccer titans Germany and Brazil, had actually banned the sport as recently as the 1960s and 1970s. As of 2006, the *Fédération Internationale de Football Association* (FIFA) found that there were approximately 26 million women soccer players, 10% of the total number of players on the globe, with both figures likely to rise throughout the 21st century (Grainey, 2012). Four million of those players were on registered teams according to FIFA, which was an increase of 54% since the world organizing body’s last inquest in 2000. The same survey found that one of every five new players registered is female.

This explosive growth has not immediately translated to success in a business sense in many cases. In the United States, marketing the U.S. Women’s National Team (USWNT) to the public was exceedingly difficult for much of the first few decades of the team’s lifespan, with minimal resources devoted to the women’s team and general apathy from corporate sponsors. The triumph at the 1999 Women’s World Cup helped establish the USWNT as a powerful brand to both public and business world alike, but recapturing that magic was difficult until the Summers of 2011 and 2012 at the Women’s World Cup and the Summer Olympics, respectively. Getting the public to buy into a women’s professional club league has been a non-starter for two

incarnations and challenging once more for a third, current incarnation, the National Women's Soccer League (NWSL).

While a small amount of research has focused on some of the social and marketing factors that made the 1999 United States' Women's National Team (USWNT) such a success (Christopherson, Janning, & McConnell, 2002; De Varona, 2004), practically no attention has been paid to the failures of professional leagues to build on that success and why two leagues failed so spectacularly. What inquisition has been undertaken (Dure, 2014; Grainey, 2012) has been largely anecdotal and confined to single issues with little in the way of context as to a broader narrative explaining the success of the USWNT in contrast to the failure of the Women's United Soccer Association (WUSA) and the Women's Professional Soccer (WPS). This study aims to fill that gap by identifying marketing factors that contributed to the success of the USWNT and the downfall of the WUSA and WPS while constructing a narrative connected by disparate evidence provided by archival materials.

Specifically, this study asks the following questions: (a) what are the marketing factors that helped the USWNT a success in 1999 and beyond? (b) what are the marketing factors that led to the downfall of the WUSA? and (c) what are the marketing factors that led to the downfall of the WPS. The outline of this paper is as follows: Methodology is detailed in an effort to provide clarity to the data gathering process. Next, results and findings are discussed in detail. Finally, managerial implications based on the findings of this research are detailed, as well as possible directions for future research.

Methodology

This study takes the form of a comprehensive literature review, combined with an analysis of archival materials of the marketing of women's soccer in the United States to

construct a narrative of the successes and failures within the sport over the better part of the past decade and a half. Specifically, this paper reviews some of the specific marketing practices that made the 1999 FIFA Women's World Cup and the USWNT a success, as well as the marketing failures of WUSA and WPS that saw both leagues cease operations after just three years each. In this research, the organizations under investigation are the USWNT, its operators at U.S. Soccer, the WUSA and its member clubs, the WPS and its member clubs, and the numerous other stakeholders involved with the above parties.

Data and Analyses

This section discusses the main sources and research methods used in this study, including data collection and analysis methods. This study used archival materials as its primary source of data, including industry reports, news clippings, online reports, press releases retrieved from stakeholder websites, newspapers, magazines, and books. Specifically, this study gathered 1,619 pages of archival materials.

While some of these sources are soccer-specific, and even women's soccer specific, others are general sport marketing industry publications. While specificity can lead to myopia in attempts to see a complete picture, the use of multiple sources from a variety of realms and disciplines is used to best construct a complete and objective narrative. Contextually, collecting and weaving information from these sources together is the best way to piece a narrative into place where one has been sorely lacking to this point (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2013). Electronic copies of each source were saved for further analyses.

A content analysis was undertaken using qualitative data software ATLAS.ti 7.0, allowing for convenient and thorough data coding and retrieval that allowed the researcher to identify and highlight themes in the collected archival material. Data were analyzed inductively

(open coded) and deductively (based on previous knowledge and other pre-existing literature such as journal and other research articles) through guidelines from Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2013) and Glaser and Strauss (1967). This process fueled the content analysis by allowing the researcher to effectively identify clear marketing themes and trends in the archival material.

The researcher began by open coding marketing themes in the archival material and categorizing them while looking for common themes and patterns. Following the process of open coding, the researcher engaged in axial coding to examine relationships and trends that may have risen to the surface after open coding (Corley & Gioia, 2004; Leopkey & Parent, 2009). An example of some of the open codes used included: ‘cable company team ownership’, ‘television time slot placement’, and ‘high visibility television networks’, which combine towards an axial code of ‘early media advantages that helped with league exposure’. From axial coding, the researcher was able to see the emergence of trends and patterns that composed the final themes discussed in the results section.

This evolving process of coding helped provide more nuanced analyses of the data, enabling a more precise picture of the findings and how they were related to the proposed theoretical framework. Proper management of data using the ATLAS.ti 7.0 software helped ensure research trustworthiness. Additionally, comparing numerous data sources, including the archival material, helped provide multiple converging lines of evidence that helped confirm each other, strengthening the data (Yin, 2013).

Results

This section is broken down into sections detailing the marketing of the USWNT in and around the 1999 Women's World Cup, the marketing of the WUSA, and the marketing of the WPS.

The USWNT and the 1999 FIFA Women's World Cup. While gradual growth had been the name of the game for the better part of a century, Title IX of the Education Amendments Act, the educational law requiring equity in athletics and all other programs that received federal funds, would change the game forever by increasing opportunities for women exponentially once passed in 1972 (Christopherson et al., 2002; De Varona, 2004; Grainey, 2012; Ladda, 2000; Longman, 2001; Overman & Sagert, 2012). This included opportunities at younger ages in youth soccer, as opposed to other countries, where gender equality was a mere afterthought, even for youth soccer (Christopherson et al., 2002).

In 1986, before the full effect of Title IX legislation had really taken root, there were just 50,000 female soccer players in the United States, a stunning number considering the rapid growth through the last decades of the 20th century (De Varona, 2004). By 1991, 40% of registered soccer players in the United States were women (Lisi, 2013). Between 1987 and 1998, the sport added over a million female participants, growing to 7.5 million participants by the end of 1998 according to the Soccer Industry Council of America (Ladda, 2000; Longman, 2001).

Far from the organized and lucrative machine it is now, the U.S. women's national team came to existence in rather haphazard circumstances. U.S. Soccer hastily cobbled together a women's national team in 1985 upon being invited to a European tournament in Jesolo, Italy by the host nation featuring three other nations that was dubbed the Mundialito (Grainey, 2012; Lisi, 2013; Longman, 2001). Despite a swelling potential fanbase now familiar with playing and

watching the game after Title IX, the USWNT would toil in obscurity for over a decade, despite growing into the primary force in the women's game. World titles were ignored instead of celebrated, and the women still played second fiddle to a hapless men's national team for much of the 20th century.

The previous success of women's soccer on a global stage in the first two FIFA Women's World Cups had intrigued both the International Olympic Committee and the organizers of the 1996 Olympic Games in Atlanta of the United States to include the sport in the Olympics for the first time as just one part of a push to include many more women's sports on the ticket (Scruton, Fasting, Pfister, & Bunuel, 1999). Despite the American's gold medal triumph that likely would have played very well for a patriotic television audience, broadcasters NBC did not present the gold medal match in full, reducing the contest to a snippet of highlights, infuriating U.S. Soccer officials (Lisi, 2013; Longman, 2001).

One of the bigger legacies of the 1996 Olympic Games was less about the play on the pitch and more about the statement the fans in the stands made. The organizers of the Olympic tournament had gambled that women's soccer in cavernous football stadiums would not be a waste of resources and were rewarded with a crowd of over 64,000 in the USWNT's semi-final against Norway and a bumper crowd of 76,489 in the final against China as women's soccer became one of the hottest tickets at the Olympics (Lisi, 2013; Longman, 2001). The end result was the highest attended public event in women's sports history at the time (Markovits & Hellerman, 2001). The turnout in numbers and the sheer enthusiasm of the chanting and flag waving American supporters came as a true shock to even the most optimistic tournament organizers as well as the International Olympic Committee (Lisi, 2013).

While the knockout stages in Athens, Georgia had drawn spectacularly, crowds had been consistently strong in the group stages held in Florida, Alabama, and Washington D.C. as well, even when the United States had not been playing. Competition organizers had hedged their bets by coupling women's games with men's games as doubleheaders, while holding some of the earlier rounds outside of the host city was a tried and true method also seen as a way to avoid fans being sucked away by more glamorous sports (Grainey, 2012).

More important than sheer numbers perhaps was the idea that it planted in the heads of organizers of the 1999 Women's World Cup, who had been in attendance. The organizers, including USSF president Alan Rothenberg, had already been thinking big for their chance at hosting the Women's World Cup, and the packed stadiums only added fuel to their belief that women's soccer could draw in such mammoth stadiums (Longman, 2001).

As the USWNT's popularity rose with their success on the pitch, so did the profile of star Mia Hamm, who found herself sharing commercials with National Basketball Association (NBA) legend Michael Jordan in an unprecedented step of equality for men and women athletes. Hamm's selflessness may have also factored into her media attitude as she was always more concerned with what was best for the USWNT instead of personal glory, often to the chagrin of a media that at times found her difficult to work with. Lisi (2013) argues that during the 1990s, Hamm had become a draw in that she made people, from dads and teenage daughters to soccer moms and young soccer playing children, want to attend USWNT games. Hamm would eventually gain an honor few other athletes ever get when her silhouette was the inspiration for the logo for Women's Professional Soccer in 2009 (Overman & Sagert, 2012). The effect was a mutually beneficial relationship between Hamm, increasingly becoming a household name, and

U.S. Soccer, who was lining their coffers as attendance records were broken as the sport enjoyed an upsurge in popularity.

After the victory at the 1996 Olympic Games, the USWNT would turn its focus towards the 1999 Women's World Cup to be held in the United States for the first time ever (Markovits & Hellerman, 2004). It would take a while for the federation to crank up preparations for the 1999 Women's World Cup in earnest, though friendly tournaments (with sponsorship from Nike) were arranged. With attendances such as the above and a crowd of over seventeen thousand for a friendly against England in San Jose, California, it was something of a mystery as to why more of these lucrative friendlies were not arranged (Markovits & Hellerman, 2001). It took a while for many of the TV networks to catch on though, as ABC, broadcaster of the 1999 Women's World Cup, did not actually televise a women's match until a friendly win against Canada in June, shortly before the beginning of the tournament itself (Overman & Sagert, 2012).

The 1999 Women's World Cup would break down more than attendance records by the end of July in the United States. The event would be called "the very first soccer event in the United States with a genuine mass following and popular involvement on the part of the general American public," which considering the country had hosted the men's FIFA World Cup five years earlier, was quite the bold statement (Markovits & Hellerman, 2001, p. 26). Some saw the event as something far beyond mere sport, seeing it as the heart of "a boom-time celebration of gender opportunity" that also saw women making significant strides in the American political and corporate world at the same time (Longman, 2001, p. 15).

The project was largely the brainchild of Alan Rothenberg, who had been in charge as president and CEO of the 1994 event and who had worked tirelessly to make the 1999 FIFA Women's World Cup a success (De Varona, 2004). Funding came largely from the United States

Soccer Federation, which loaned money towards a de facto organizing committee but who were actually underwriting the tournament itself as a show of support. FIFA's marketing department had pledged six million dollars towards the event, a figure that paled in comparison to the 1994 FIFA World Cup, which generated more than six times that amount (Longman, 2001).

Initial efforts at marketing the 1999 Women's World Cup in the United States largely focused on emulating previously successful strategies in marketing women's sporting events that had been developed since the early 1970s. Organizers also actively targeted a different core fanbase than that of the men's World Cup that had been held in the United States just a half-decade earlier. Instead of selling to a primarily 18-49 male audience that is typically the target of sports marketers, organizers for the 1999 Women's World Cup sought to "inspire the next generation," largely building off the success of the women's soccer tournament at the 1996 Summer Olympics, when the sport had shattered attendance records for women's soccer in the United States (De Varona, 2004, p. 10).

From the beginning, the event had powerful marketing interests within the United States working to make it a success. The chair of the 1999 Women's World Cup, Donna de Varona, had already helped found the Women's Sport Foundation to help support women's sports, protecting rights and funding young, hopeful athletes, while also raising money for female sports initiatives and conducting progressive research projects (De Varona, 2004). Much of the task of making the numbers add up was thrust upon Marla Messing, who had previously served as the executive vice president of the 1994 FIFA World Cup in the United States (Longman, 2001). Messing faced the unenviable task of justifying FIFA's decision to allow the 1999 Women's World Cup to be held in massive football stadiums after earlier plans called upon organizers to hold the event in smaller stadiums on the East Coast in an effort to keep foreseeable losses to a minimum

(Grainey, 2012). In the end, however, Messing's initial ticket estimates ended up being conservative to say the very least, roughly a half of what was actual sold for the 1999 Women's World Cup.

Given the uncertainty in the amount of external support for the tournament, players on the USWNT took it upon themselves to help advertise and promote the event. Reasoning that coming to the fans instead of hoping fans would come to them would be the best way to sell tickets, the tournament organizers made a concerted push to get the word out personally in the months before the tournament. The effort stretched as far back as Columbus Day weekend of 1997, when tents were set up across the nation and in the biggest cities, with free gear being handed out to try and spread awareness of the tournament through word of mouth (Longman, 2001).

A large push was made to market the event via grassroots initiatives, taking event promotion, quite literally, to the suburbs. Parents of soccer playing youths, dubbed soccer moms and dads, were targeted by organizers, as were teenage girls and women, demographics diametrically opposed to the ones that had been targeted by the organizers of the 1994 FIFA World Cup (De Varona, 2004). Besides being featured in sporting magazines, the USWNT also tried to reach a broader audience in non-sporting magazines aimed at women such as *Seventeen*, *Cosmopolitan*, and *Teen People*. The teenage girls saw not just "trading-card idols" in the USWNT, but also indicators of possible achievement in the future (Longman, 2001, p. 32).

The players had established personal-services contracts with the organizers of the 1999 Women's World Cup and worked tirelessly to push the event to anyone who would listen (Longman, 2001). It was a far cry from the detached, impersonal nature of most professional athletes of the day. Personal appearances were largely the order of the day at not just soccer

functions but also schools and sporting goods stores, willing to strike up a conversation with those willing to hear them out.

Organizers made a major marketing push at numerous youth tournaments in the run up to the 1999 Women's World Cup. Poster contests were held, while organizers also made sure that branded merchandise, including bracelets with the official slogan of the tournament, were distributed en masse (De Varona, 2004). The organizing group also coordinated with popular media of the day to record official tournament media, such as a theme song for the event. The collective efforts worked well, with the organizers having sold two hundred thousand tickets before the end of 1998 despite not using television or billboards as part of their long-term strategy (Longman, 2001). Attendance targets steadily rose to half a million live spectators just before the tournament's start as advance sales were strong (Grainey, 2012).

While some sponsors showed tepid interest, those that did take a chance with the USWNT usually went all in for their efforts. Nike's infamous "I Will Have Two Fillings" advertisement, in which one U.S. player needed two fillings at the dentist, resulting in all the others getting matching fillings in a show of unity, became one of the iconic images of this generation of U.S. women's soccer (Longman, 2001). The ad was part of a five million dollar ad campaign from Nike in the months before the competition, with the giant sports corporation likely looking for a return from its more than \$120 million association with U.S. Soccer.

Besides Nike, other corporate sponsors also pitched in to help promote the team in the run up to the 1999 Women's World Cup. Such corporate giants as Adidas, Bud Lite, and Gatorade also threw their lot in with the USWNT, hoping they would be backing a winner in the coming July (Longman, 2001). U.S. Soccer had had little faith in the USWNT's impact financially over the years, but Marla Messing believed that Nike saw an opportunity to tap into a

ready and willing market and nudged U.S. Soccer into more equitable treatment and attention as compared to a languishing men's national team.

Quantity of sponsors did not necessarily translate into quantity of financial support however. Even when factoring in licensing deals like the Mia Hamm endorsed Soccer Barbie, which paid up to half a million dollars to the tournament organizers, overall sponsorship dollars were still light years behind the men's game (Overman & Sagert, 2012). Despite the heavy hitters lining up to sponsor the tournament, the actual support of \$6 million paled in comparison to the \$50 million that the men's World Cup had attracted (Longman, 2001).

Media coverage in the United States for the tournament was unprecedented for a women's sporting event. The USWNT's triumphs were on display on network television, when the distinction between it and cable was still meaningful in American society (Christopherson et al., 2002). Much of the tournament's success likely would have been impossible without a big television push from ABC and its cable partner, ESPN. Every match of the tournament was broadcast on either ABC or one of the two ESPN channels to over 70 countries (De Varona, 2004).

While *USA Today* and some of the daily newspapers in bigger cities covered the tournament seriously, other regional newspapers and big dailies from cities like Houston and Denver were much slower to catch on (Longman, 2001). In newspapers that did cover the tournament, Women's World Cup storylines dominated the sports pages during the dog days of Summer, while an increasingly enthralled nation tuned in, with 40 million viewers watching on television (Longman, 1999a). The U.S. were largely at the crest of a wave of enthusiasm, with viewership numbers estimated to top out at over a billion viewers around the world (Powers & Springer, 1999).

The United States' opener against Denmark drew a raucous crowd of nearly 79,000 in New Jersey that chanted "USA" throughout the match (Longman, 2001). The attendance was a record for a women's sporting event in the United States and a mark that was second in the venue only to an appearance from the Pope. Many in attendance were dubbed ponytail hooligans, a rabid set of young girls (and boys) in face paint, jerseys, and carrying signs revealing the adulation of their sporting heroines (Grainey, 2012). Mia Hamm's opening goal was signified as a very important one in some circles, with the fortunes of the tournament being seen as tied to the fortunes of its most recognizable player. Her profile had rocketed since the USWNT's 1996 Olympic triumph, and justifying the hype and the endorsements was necessary to avoid a backlash.

As the tournament continued on, the prestige of the event was growing such that celebrities and notable figures began to want to be associated with it. This included United States President Bill Clinton though, to be fair, he had helped with the promotion of the tournament beforehand. Clinton would attend multiple knockout stage matches, including the final at the Rose Bowl in Pasadena, California, where he claimed he was "so far on the edge of my seat" that he "almost fell out of the skybox" (Longman, 2001, p. 4). ESPN also used Clinton as an advertising tool, hyping the possibility of his appearance before an official announcement (Grainey, 2012).

Other celebrities, including actor Karl Malden and singer Jennifer Lopez turned their attention to the tournament's closing stages as well. Lopez was even called into duty to entertain the capacity crowd before the final (Grainey, 2012). It was another sign of the scope of the event, with famous singers usually being reserved for the biggest and most watched sporting events in the U.S., such as the Super Bowl. Clinton's interest was replicated throughout the broader media,

with the USWNT suddenly becoming popular gets for the world of late night television and hosts like David Letterman (De Varona, 2004).

The tournament as a whole was an overwhelming and unparalleled success. It has been called “far and away the most popular event in the entire history of women’s team sports,” while the final also shattered television records for a soccer game in the United States (Markovits & Hellerman, 2004, p. 20). The organizers were awash in cash in a relative sense, outperforming original projections of \$21 million of revenue by nearly a factor of two, bringing in \$38 million and ending up with a budget surplus of between \$2.5 and \$3.5 million, a reality that likely would have been unthinkable while the tournament was still in the planning stages (Longman, 2001).

Markovits and Hellerman (2004) claimed that the events of 1999 both on and off the pitch “put women’s soccer ‘on the map’,” helping to kickstart a “recognizable niche” for the sport (p. 21). The authors also called the event “nothing less than a watershed event in the history of both women’s team sports and soccer in the United States in terms of attendance, media attention, television ratings, cultural awareness, and potential for the future” (p. 21). The ABC television show Nightline claimed the team “may have changed women’s sports forever” (Grainey, 2012, p. 29).

While advance ticket sales had been strong, walkup and late sales had been brisk as well, leading to a total tournament attendance of over 650,000 (Markovits & Hellerman, 2004). The final pitting the USWNT against China drew a remarkable 92,000 fans into Pasadena, California’s Rose Bowl stadium (Cox & Thompson, 2003). The total attendance for the tournament more than doubled that of the previous high water mark for a women’s sporting event, the 1999 NCAA women’s basketball tournament, which drew just over 300,000 spectators (Longman, 2001). The enormous total attendance for the event likely made some at FIFA look

sheepish after initial proposals for the tournament to be held entirely on the East Coast in tiny stadiums of no more than 50,000 seats, with the final to have been held in RFK Stadium in Washington D.C., which seated a little over 56,000 in total.

Tangible results for ABC and ESPN, who had gone out on a limb to broadcast every match of the tournament, were apparent as well. Cable Nielsen ratings were adequate in the eyes of the organizers, averaging a 1.45 for the matches aired on the ESPN cable networks (Markovits & Hellerman, 2004). Despite their paltry appearance, those numbers were still higher than Major League Soccer numbers had been drawing for the network (Martzke, 1999). Overall media coverage on the whole also dwarfed anything Major League Soccer had seen in four years of existence to that point (Markovits & Hellerman, 2001). Early ratings on network television were slightly patchy, with the opening match for the USWNT drawing just a 1.7 rating on ABC, a marginal number at best.

Momentum built throughout the tournament, especially as the United States kept winning. The semi-final featuring Brazil and the United States that aired on ESPN was a stunning success, with the Sunday afternoon broadcast netting a 3.8 rating, the highest ever at that point for a soccer match on basic cable and a number that also bested some playoff hockey games aired on ESPN (Sandomir, 1999).

The final itself turned out to be a high water mark for soccer viewership in the United States for any gender, with the match between the United States and China drawing a staggering 11.4 Nielsen rating and 31 share, meaning 31% of television sets in the U.S. turned on at the time were tuned to the match (Markovits & Hellerman, 2004). At the time, it was the most watched soccer game in the United States, involving either men or women. Those numbers were also comparable to NBA Finals and World Series game ratings in 1999 and 1998, respectively

(Herzog, 1999; Zipay, 1999). Estimates of the viewing audience for the final topped out at over 4.0 million viewers (Cox & Thompson, 2004). The late running broadcast of the final even pre-empted ABC's World News tonight broadcast, unheard of at the time, when many peripheral sporting events were shunted onto tertiary networks if running long (Grainey, 2012).

The key players of the USWNT also saw a boom in endorsement opportunities at the conclusion of the tournament. With numerous corporations seeing that the image of their brand could be enhanced through these endorsements, the USWNT was a hot commodity (Cornwell, Roy, & Steinard II, 2001; Javalgi, Traylor, Gross, & Lampman, 1994; McDonald, 1991). It ended up being a far cry from some of the predictions made as late as the day before the final event, when some marketing experts made it known that they did not foresee much endorsement opportunity for the USWNT given their team-centric ways. It was ironic thinking, as the off the mark projections seemed to feel that the very aspects of the USWNT that made them appealing to much of America would also make them undesirable on Madison Avenue.

The Women's United Soccer Association (WUSA). Following the success of the Women's World Cup, eager entrepreneurs formed the Women's United Soccer Association (WUSA), the U.S.' first professional women's soccer club league. The success, both on and off the pitch, of the USWNT intrigued some within the world of sport business, who saw it as a potential jumping off point for a new professional women's soccer league. They believed that a league built around the suddenly rock star-like USWNT stars combined with some of the world's best international women's players could be viable. The suddenly intrigued figures felt that with enough funding, a women's professional league in the United States could be tops among women's soccer leagues around the world. A viable league offered a chance for "a concurrent

change in the ways in which girls and women relate to sports and sports culture” (Markovits & Hellerman, 2001, p. 270).

At the same time though, many of those same people also warned that a “fundamental shift” was necessary in how “women and girls relate to sports and sports culture, not so much as participants but as followers” (Markovits and Hellerman, 2001, p. 179). The above argued that while Title IX had opened countless doors as far as sport participation was concerned, the adoption of women’s team sports as ‘culture’ for females was less apparent. While many males retain an interest in following sports beyond their days of playing as youths, this has not traditionally been the case with females, with most women not “[immersing] themselves in the culture of being fans and followers of a team and its sport” (Markovits & Hellerman, 2001, p. 180). Getting young soccer playing girls to become active fans of the sport later in life has been seen as key for ages in the theoretical success of a women’s professional soccer league in the United States.

The profile and potential drawing power of the USWNT had risen to the point that investors in the new professional league were eager to make the twenty players from the 1999 team partners in the league with equity shares (Markovits & Hellerman, 2001). With player salaries at one point between \$27,000-\$85,000, the WUSA afforded women’s soccer players professional opportunities all but unheard of for team sport athletes. Major national brands such as Hyundai, Johnson & Johnson, Proctor and Gamble, AFLAC, Gatorade, and Sports Illustrated all signed on as initial sponsors after some early trepidation when for the longest time, just two had signed on the dotted line (Jowdy & McDonald, 2003; Longman, 2001). At the same time though, the lack of a major apparel sponsor, important for professional sports leagues, was a

worrying point, especially considering Nike and Reebok had previously shown interest in helping a league begin (Lisi, 2013; Longman, 2001).

An initial four-year television deal with TNT and CNN/SI also afforded more media exposure than ever before for players (Jowdy & McDonald, 2003; Markovits & Hellerman, 2001). A local television alliance also ensured home markets would see every game beyond just what was televised nationally (Longman, 2001). Television concerns also may have dictated which markets got franchises as well, as regional media conglomerates controlled most or all of WUSA's clubs during the league's lifespan (Grainey, 2012).

The run-up to the beginning of play in the league was not completely smooth, however. WUSA struggled to find a leader to stick in the front office, while launch efforts were also hampered by the USWNT's failure to win a gold medal at the 2000 Summer Olympics. Additionally, the marketing wing of the league was hardly versed in the business of selling team sports (Longman, 2001). The Orlando franchise was moved to North Carolina and rebranded, while the league's star power suffered without Michelle Akers in the fold for the first season. Others sounded warnings that investors would want a return on their money eventually, not willing to just invest in women as a social statement (Lisi, 2013).

Like marketing for the 1999 Women's World Cup, the league marketed its players as role models to be looked up to in a world of largely arrogant and selfish professional athletes (Jowdy & McDonald, 2003). Investors felt they were putting their dollars behind a product that would "leave a mark in furthering the development of strong values for America's youth" (Grainey, 2012, p. 45). Another big crux of drawing fans was ease of access to players, and a big event with said access, the Soccer Sensation festival before the league's title game helped

attendance for the league's showpiece, with the final seeing over twenty-one thousand in attendance.

WUSA marketing generally followed a similar ethos as that used to promote the USWNT, namely, to get the fans to come to you, you'd have to come to the fans to build awareness and affection. Grassroot initiatives were undertaken to "make the players very accessible and visible in their communities" (Jowdy & McDonald, 2003, p. 301). Players were readily available for fan interaction, including autographs, at home games as well. The approach worked, as a league study showed ninety-eight percent of fans believed their experience met or exceeded expectations (Cassidy, 2001). However, television numbers floundered. Despite outdrawing every Major League Soccer game on opening weekend, television ratings were anemic, with fewer than four hundred thousand viewers nationwide, though that number also topped MLS broadcasts at the time.

A Boston marketing firm president, James Chung, did not agree with WUSA's focus on families and youth, especially in trying to target soccer moms. Chung argued that the soccer mom phenomena had already come and gone, with sponsors not resonating with campaigns to target that particular demographic any more (Longman, 2003). Chung argued that it was actually soccer dads that made many of the purchasing decisions, including with merchandise, and that the league had erred severely in not targeting a group that had been exploited to great success by 1999 Women's World Cup organizers.

Despite diminishing returns from ticket sales, television ratings, and sponsor revenue, the league pushed on with its marketing campaigns towards youth. Some within the league realized they needed to expand their target market to include teenagers and the 'soccer dad' crowd that had been so eager to support the 1999 Women's World Cup, but Hendricks and the rest realized

this far too late. The atmosphere at WUSA games was appealing to young kids, but was hardly that for older teenagers or adults, especially males. Some adult males even felt that “the atmosphere demeaned both the game and the women who played it, while simultaneously making them feel unwelcome” (Grainey, 2012, p. 60).

Initial attendance was strong at over eight thousand spectators a game in WUSA’s inaugural season, but the early sizzle fizzled with average attendance falling by around a thousand fans a game by the league’s final season (Grainey, 2012). By the third season, the league was truly cutting to the bone after burning through cash reserves at an alarming rate. Roster sizes declined and league offices moved as the attendance dipped noticeably, while television ratings on networks away from sporting giant ESPN were minimal (French, 2002). WUSA had largely been counting on their marquee attraction, Mia Hamm, to drive their marketing. Hamm was described by Grainey (2012) as “the touchstone, the face of the league to the youth market and the one person that league survival hinged on” (p. 49). Hamm was front and center of the advertising for the league, and attendance both at home for her D.C. Freedom club and away when she went on the road were much higher than league averages.

Television ratings for the league at the end of the first season were alarmingly low, especially considering team owners were in large part in the cable business. It was enough to force games to the largely anonymous PAX television network beginning in season two, often in conflict with Major League Soccer games being broadcast on ESPN or ESPN2 (Grainey, 2012). Coakley (2009) has claimed that spectator sports depend on media entities such as television for revenue, promotion, and publicity among other things, with the bigger the network, the better the gain. Obviously, the move to PAX was a serious step backwards in this regard. There were other

shakeups, both in the location and personnel of the league front office, which moved to Atlanta from New York City and cut staff while hiring new faces, including a new CEO (Grainey, 2012).

Despite the moves, attendance lagged, dropping to just over seven thousand per game at the end of the second season, with the Washington D.C. and Atlanta franchises dropping more than five thousand spectators in average attendance (Grainey, 2012). There were further alarming signs as well, with television ratings barely registering above test patterns, with an abysmal 0.1 average Nielsen rating on PAX. Financially, the league was sinking, with losses of up to fifty-five million dollars hampered by just fifteen million dollars in revenue through two seasons.

There was a mini-backlash with part of the target audience too, as a study by James Chung into the marketing of the league found that young girls found the league to be uncool as they got older and were embarrassed to wear league apparel (Longman, 2003). Additionally, Southall and Nagel (2007) found that targeting soccer moms and young girls was a potentially fatal flaw, with the two constituent groups not showing as much fondness for consuming sport entertainment as young men and boys. The same study found that those that did come to the game were not consistent attendees, driving revenue potential down.

As the league continued to lose money, it also shed sponsors, robbing it of vital cash streams it needed to stay afloat. After the first season's struggles, league officials estimated they needed eight contracts worth \$2.5 million each for exclusive sponsorship rights in certain product categories (Grainey, 2012). They got just two, in the form of Hyundai and Johnson and Johnson, with both only offering two million dollars each. Particularly frustrating was the reticence of Nike, one of the USWNT's and Mia Hamm's major patrons over the years. The major athletic company offered no support other than apparel for three of the league's teams. In

total, the league was fifteen million dollars short on a sponsorship target for its final season (Rovell, 2003).

By the third season, the writing was on the wall, even if few wanted to admit it. Attendance suffered mightily, even with whispers of inflation in the final count for some clubs (Grainey, 2012). Payroll budgets were slashed by nearly thirty percent from the first season of play, while playing rosters were trimmed as well. The television companies that were underwriting the clubs and much of the programming were sweating, as nobody was watching, which was detrimental to hopes of selling commercial time to advertisers. After the third season of the league, Time-Warner and Comcast, who both ran teams, pulled the plug, dooming the league. A lack of revenue from sponsorship and elsewhere proved fatal, the league unable to extricate itself from a sea of red ink.

The WUSA's demise in 2003 was abrupt but hardly unforeseeable. Regardless, the timing, right before the Women's World Cup, was devastating for USWNT morale, as many believed a strong showing from the team would help reignite interest in the struggling league. When all was said and done though, the investors, most notably John Hendricks, had grossly overestimated the enthusiasm that had come with the 1999 Women's World Cup and found themselves unable to translate that into a viable framework for a professional league. Estimates were that investors had dumped over a hundred million dollars into the league and were still over sixteen million dollars in debt when the WUSA shut its doors (Lisi, 2013).

The WPS era. The struggles for recognition endured by the USWNT after the retirement of the stars of the 1999 team made launching a second professional league all the more difficult after the spectacular flameout of the WUSA. U.S. Soccer had contributed a small amount of startup money to Women's Soccer Initiative Inc. to try and launch a new professional league in

2006 (Grainey, 2012). Numerous false starts saw markets enter and exit discussions to enter a new league, with a launch delayed until 2009. The delay may have also been necessary to deliver an uninterrupted debut season given the 2007 Women's World Cup and 2008 Summer Olympics that would have made for a logistical nightmare for a startup league. The single-entity system of the WUSA was out, with the new league reasoning individual owners would know best according to market size and demographics.

The new league was officially dubbed Women's Professional Soccer (WPS) early in 2008, with play officially set to begin in 2009. Owners would buy in for \$1.5 million a franchise, with budgets topping out at two million dollars (Grainey, 2012). Salaries, a massive drain in WUSA, were kept more in check, with a salary cap of \$565,000 enforced, with most USWNT players making around \$40,000. Money, while not close to WUSA levels, was reasonable at the beginning of Women's Professional Soccer's lifespan. Some clubs like Boston were able to afford public relations agencies to help with promotion. Wood also noted that in those early WPS days, clubs were able to afford an entire communications department and a full-time sales staff. Sustainability though was again a key in the eyes of many, with warnings that another failure would likely be fatal for professional women's soccer in the U.S. for a generation.

At the very least, WPS was taking a radically different approach to broadcasting its product, partially out of necessity. Before, big cable conglomerates had owned and operated the WUSA franchises, ensuring the teams would be seen at the very least, though relationships obviously soured when the programming was pushed onto the anonymous PAX Network. WPS, however, struck a deal with Fox Soccer Channel for one game a week in the regular season at a mostly consistent time slot on Sunday afternoons. However, WPS also wasn't getting paid rights

fees, instead splitting advertising revenue with the channel, something that would prove to be an albatross around the league's neck later (Grainey, 2012).

The dogged persistence of players promoting supporting the league as a cause that ultimately helped doom the WUSA was being shied away from by WPS, who purportedly understood running a professional sports league was a business. The league wanted to, like other professional leagues, put an emphasis on the quality of the product rather than overtly being a charitable cause. Pointedly, the league claimed its mission was “to be the premier women's soccer league in the world and the global standard by which women's professional sports are measured” (Grainey, 2012, p. 77).

It appeared that executives of the new league had not learned from the mistakes of their predecessors in terms of who it was targeting. Outreach was almost entirely bent towards youth clubs, placing a clear emphasis on the target markets WUSA had gone after earlier in the decade. WPS Director of Communications Robert Penner identified the league's target market before the inaugural season as “the young female soccer player age 8-18 who plays at the club and recreational level” (Berger, 2009). Tellingly, one-time WPS CEO Tonya Antonucci mentioned “young girls age 8-18 and their families” and “fitness-minded women and mothers” as the league's fanbase, giving short shrift to marketing to males in any capacity (Albanese Jr., 2010).

The league set up a quid pro quo arrangement, with WPS players participating in camps for these clubs in exchange for match tickets. The league even established a licensed camps setup to try and target markets not covered by the clubs playing in the league, though returns were largely minimal in building the brand, with players being ferried to the likes of Council Bluffs and Reno, hardly soccer hotbeds (Grainey, 2012). Other more traditional efforts saw clubs and high school teams invited to attend practices and enjoy meet and greets with the team after those

practices. Though results were mixed, Zhang, Lam, and Connaughton (2003) suggest that these types of grassroots initiatives can help generate love and passion towards teams and organizations, making it a worthy cause.

Already facing a skeptical press after the implosion of the WUSA, clubs found themselves scrambling to attract media attention to generate publicity. Some clubs, like Boston tried to woo reporters with total access. The Breakers' Ryan Wood noted that the club invited newspapers to do stories on not just players but the organization, while trying to woo the media to spend a day with the club and its officials, emphasizing the lengths that clubs would go to to get noticed (personal communication, July 23, 2014). The proverbial opening of the gates seemed to work, as Wood cited many major Boston media outlets' willingness to cooperate and brainstorm for story ideas lending vital exposure.

While the new league's television deal with Fox Soccer Channel (FSC) put pressure on it to bring in advertisers, it also afforded it an opportunity to reach out to a new target market. FSC's audience was "predominately male, eighteen-to-forty-nine-year-old soccer savvy viewers," a much coveted audience that WUSA had failed to touch in large part (Grainey, 2012, p. 76). It was another trade-off, as FSC was also looking to reach a female demographic much of its programming didn't appeal to. The FSC audience for WPS matches ended up being mostly male, showing that the league indeed was at least reaching a group that was also ardent fans of the network's other programming.

Other than the FSC TV deal, efforts to reach beyond families and children were scattershot at best. 2010 brought a campaign to 'Defend Your Turf', complete with YouTube video featuring gladiatorial music and impressive highlights from the league's first season. The league also took aim with giant banners featuring the slogan in cities as well. On the whole

though, it was a half-hearted effort, and the campaign was largely forgotten by all in the weeks to come. Outfitter and long-time sponsor Puma tried their own grassroots campaign, highlighting some of the league's top talent with upbeat commercials showcasing soccer talent and beauty, aimed at reaching young women soccer players.

Though the league didn't manage as many high profile sponsors out of the gate as the WUSA had, it still was able to reign in a handful, including a much needed apparel provider, Puma, who paid ten million dollars over three years to outfit the league's clubs (Grainey, 2012). Other sponsors like AdvoCare, FluMist, Hint, MedImmune, and the U.S. Coast Guard were hardly household names, but getting any sponsors to pitch in after the WUSA disaster a half-decade earlier could have been seen as a win. At the individual club level though, securing sponsorships was much harder, with Boston specifically not even reaching half of an initial target for sponsorship revenue (Grainey, 2012).

Things still looked to be on the up after one season though, with CEO Tonya Antonucci claiming in a conference call that local sponsorships of clubs had gone up 150% (Pel, 2010). Shirt sponsorships lagged early, with just two clubs featuring partnerships in the league's first season, which was problematic as internal projections had the value of a sponsorship like that at upwards of \$1.2 million (Kassouf, 2010). CitiGroup joined up in the league's second season to sponsor Sky Blue FC's shirts and were also on the back of every WPS team's shirt, and it was little wonder why. Research found that thirty percent of the league's fanbase was flush with disposable income, earning one hundred fifty thousand dollars or more a year (Van Riper, 2010).

While league head Tonya Antonucci, among others, spoke of wanting to emphasize the dynamics of the sport like tactics and strategy that appealed to hardcore fans, just how they planned to do so was never really clear. While the advent of social media facilitated such

discussions in an arena much more easily, the league itself seemed relatively clueless to generate such discussion centrally. The league's website, a potential hub for such features, was a bare bones affair, offering little more than news and results, with statistic tracking, a major boon for other leagues, a quite spartan affair, with just the basics being kept.

The embrace of social media may ultimately be WPS' lasting legacy on the women's soccer world. Longtime Chicago Red Stars employee Alyse Lahue recalls the influence of current Major League Soccer employee Amanda Vandervoort in building a social media profile for WPS when she worked for the league (personal communication, July 31, 2014). According to Lahue, WPS was a major presence on Twitter in its heyday, noting that the league was in the top four in the United States in Twitter followers at one point, a remarkable achievement given the otherwise low profile of the league.

League officials aimed for average attendance between four and six thousand in the opening season of WPS, and they reached that goal with 4,493 spectators a game in the regular season, though three franchises lagged under four thousand a game (Grainey, 2012). Attendance for the WPS title match in Los Angeles was just over seven thousand, a big disappointment considering they had netted twice that in the opening match of the league month's earlier. Despite the middling attendance and losses that reached seven figures, partially down to an ailing American economy, the league showed enough promise to lure two new clubs for the 2010 season in Atlanta and Philadelphia, each bringing in over a million dollars in expansion fees.

The second season of WPS was one with some serious ups and downs throughout. The league had already suffered a hammer blow when Los Angeles Sol owners AEG had pulled the plug on the team after a first season which had seen the club lose upwards of three million dollars according to some reports (Grainey, 2012). On the pitch, Philadelphia overcame

somewhat basic accommodations to establish themselves as a real contender early on, while their counterparts in Atlanta were largely a laughingstock, going through two head coaches and countless players en route to a last place finish.

Clubs were also quick to try and latch onto whatever opportunities arose to associate themselves with notable figures to try and boost recognition from the public at-large. Wood spoke of a WPS program where players went to the White House as a part of a promotion with First Lady Michelle Obama, providing a priceless opportunity to associate the league with a prominent public figure (personal communication, July 23, 2014).

Atlanta's desultory showing was not the only woeful development in 2010, as the Saint Louis franchise had a debacle of its own, folding in late May when they ran out of money. The club's owner, Jeff Cooper, had erred by bringing in overseas investors Sanjeev and Heemal Vaid, whose business credentials were dubious to say the least. The duo had quietly taken over a controlling interest in the team and did not seem to be too interested in funding the club after May. With no bond set aside in case of a disaster like this and the league having no room to keep the club running for the rest of the season, the Saint Louis team abruptly folded in late May, right in the middle of the league's second season (Grainey, 2012). It was an embarrassing setback for the league, one that likely added fuel to claims that a women's professional league was impossible to maintain.

Eyes were raised when in late July, the league announced a restructuring of its staff, with marketing resources being redirected to the clubs to try and boost plummeting attendance. It was a kind way of saying that the league's front office staff was being trimmed in a cost-cutting maneuver. Perhaps the biggest name to depart was Chief Operating Officer Mary Harvey, who had been with the league almost from the beginning and was tasked with much oversight over

the league's happenings. Among the other positions being cut was that of 'New Media Manager' held by Vandervort (Pel, 2010). Considering the league had been touting its success with social media in reaching fans just a few months earlier, it seemed the height of lunacy. Regardless, the message was clear: The teams were on their own if they wanted to boost their ticket sales.

It was a precursor to the chaos of the offseason before the 2011 campaign. The announcement that the league had added a much needed new face in the Western New York Flash, a club with devoted (and high spending) leadership and a settled stadium situation was a welcome one. The rest of the offseason was a rancorous affair, with team owners cutting to the bone to desperately stop the tide of red ink, with every club having lost at least \$980,000 (Rosen, 2011). Gone were the league's CEO, COO, and most of the other executive staff from the league office (Grainey, 2012). The league owners were rapidly grabbing power, eliminating many of the individuals who had made the league functional in the first place.

Attendance, already close to the edge in 2009 sank in 2010, with many soccer fans instead turning their attentions towards the men's World Cup in the Summer. The league was now averaging less than four thousand patrons a game, stretching finances dangerously (Grainey, 2012). The requirement of a bond for the 2011 season was in some ways needed after the Saint Louis fiasco but also ill-timed for clubs barely making it. In the end, FC Gold Pride couldn't find investors to offset massive losses of upwards of five million dollars, while Chicago finally sank under its toxic stadium lease. Boston would only put their bond forward at the eleventh hour after guarantees that the league would continue, while the Hendricks family sold the Washington D.C. club to Dan Borislow, who would bring many problems of his own in due course.

Borislow was necessary though, as with FC Gold Pride folding and Chicago withdrawing to play in a lower division, the league was at its bare minimum of teams with six. There were

other signs before the start of the season that the vultures were circling the league. The schedule was reduced by twenty-five percent, while there was also a mid-season break to accommodate the Women's World Cup, which owners were hoping would boost attendance. WPS was no longer a national league, with all six franchises on the East Coast, a move that may have been unavoidable financially but which also alienated fans an entire country away from a team they could support in person.

Borislow would soon have the league back in the headlines for all the wrong reasons. He renamed the Washington Freedom after his phone product 'magicJack' and paid out big salaries to some of the best players in the league. He also moved the team to Boca Raton, Florida and clashed constantly with the league over every rule imaginable, rules he was willing to break despite points deductions and an eventual ban from the sidelines after he coached the club from the bench despite no prior coaching credentials (Dure, 2013). Borislow was also churlish and confrontational with local and national media, a big mistake considering Nichols, Moynahan, Hall, and Taylor (2002) report that media performances by sport organizations can have major impacts on organizational image. Borislow was also verbally abusive to players, and a set of e-mails were leaked across the internet, giving the league its most attention perhaps ever but at the cost of WPS looking like buffoons for even going into business with the man in the first place (Dure, 2013).

Borislow didn't bother to hire much in the way of a marketing staff or any other staff for that matter, meaning the club full of USWNT stars and other talented players often played in front of crowds who had arrived via word of mouth and who were sometimes setting behind a set of rope chains on the grass if the small amount of stadium seating was filled (Dure, 2013). Other

than a chance to see their heroes play and get an autograph or two after the game, the match day experience was precisely what the league probably wanted to avoid.

Counteracting the downward spiral in attendance was a thoroughly debated subject in WPS club offices. Ryan Wood of the Boston Breakers was adamant in his declaration that his club actively pursued an older audience to supplement the youth market that had always served as the backbone for professional women's soccer clubs in the United States (personal communication, July 23, 2014). However, Wood also noted some of the difficulties of catering to an adult audience. He recounted one story from the club's WPS days when parents actively complained to the management about the club's supporters group, the Riptide, railing against the group's behavior, which Wood typified as being rowdy but not drunk. Inevitably, tensions such as these only underlined the difficulties of clubs in bringing in a diverse crowd to maximize attendance.

Getting every seat filled was crucial, as budgets began to diminish markedly as seasons wore on (personal communication, July 23, 2014). Front office personnel were cut in cost saving maneuvers according to Wood, to the point that he ended up being the entire communications department. Full-time positions were slashed in favor of interns who were inconsistently motivated. Hard decisions as to what to emphasize in marketing with a shrinking budget frustrated those who remained. Wood also indicated that by the end of 2011, clubs were down to bare bones in terms of operating staff. League and club alike showed problems in attracting and retaining sponsors as the league entered a death spiral. While jersey sponsorships fetched \$60,000-100,000, according to Wood, confidence in the league and its clubs from potential sponsors was slowly eroding as squabbles increased and attendance and revenue decreased.

The increased visibility and popularity of the USWNT after their exploits in Germany's Women's World Cup gave the aimless WPS a new target market to try and go after, namely the cross-section of soccer fans young and old who had been captivated by the team's run to the Women's World Cup final. The return of the USWNT players after the Women's World Cup brought a surge in attendance, with an average of 8,141 fans for four games in the weekend after the tournament final (Grainey, 2012). Sahlen Stadium in Rochester drew a WPS record 15,404 for the return of hometown heroine Abby Wambach. Average attendance did dip back down to just a little above three thousand towards the end of July, but it had still been a much needed shot in the arm for a flagging league and underlined some of the potential gains if the league could only effectively target what seemed to be a ready and willing market with their product.

But the Borislow fiasco had submarined what little credibility the league had left, and a court battle drained what little was left of the league's finances. Nobody was willing to invest in a league that looked so clownish despite an attendance boom and increased TV ratings after the 2011 Women's World Cup, and despite the charade of holding a college draft in January of 2012 to try to proceed with five teams after Borislow was ejected from the league, WPS folded at the end of the month. Cynically, it left the players just days to find clubs in Europe before the transfer window closed, perhaps underlining the lack of professionalism that undercut the league's efforts for the better part of three years.

Discussion

While the success that surrounded the USWNT when it eventually arrived was dramatic, for much of the first decade and a half of the team's existence, it fell victim to many of the issues that have plagued women's sport in the United States in the past and the present. This was perhaps felt most prominently in terms of funding in those early days, with the program suffering

through the same shortfall monetarily that has afflicted women's sport teams and leagues through history (Messner, 2002). Preparation was haphazard, accommodations were spartan, and opportunities were inconsistent, leading many to make hard sacrifices in terms of living arrangements and employment to just keep playing with the USWNT.

The other major roadblock facing the USWNT in those early years was a lack of attention from the media and sponsors that rendered promotion and substantial growth of the program near impossible. Like most women's sport in those decades, the USWNT was almost always out of sight and out of mind in terms of media coverage, even when triumphant on the pitch (Duncan & Messner, 1996, Festle, 1996). With no visibility to curious eyes, potential sponsors remained apathetic, making a traditionally hard job of recruiting corporate dollars to women's sport even more difficult. In those early years, even the coverage the team did get, like the 1996 Summer Olympic tournament, was often reduced to highlight clips.

The ambitious plans for the 1999 FIFA Women's World Cup and the USWNT's participation in the tournament demanded that organizers and officials both increase support and funding to remove any notion of the event being a half-hearted effort, as well as turning the tide and increasing media and sponsor support of women's soccer and the USWNT. Gone was any plan of holding the event in smaller stadiums, eschewed for a 'big event' philosophy that saw matches being held in gigantic football stadiums, like the men's FIFA World Cup five years earlier. Simultaneously, the organizers knew that they had to take their one best shot at engaging a public that was participating in soccer in greater numbers but that had to this point had little exposure to or appetite for the USWNT.

The timing of the endeavor turned out to be strong, with the USWNT's first mega star, Mia Hamm, fully hitting her stride. Hamm broke the mold off the pitch as well as on it, attracting

the attention of Madison Avenue when women's sport sponsorship had been dominated by individual sport athletes such as figure skaters and gymnasts (Duncan & Hasbrook, 1988; Kane, 1989). Hamm's sheer star power was complemented by a selfless attitude that also formed a crux of the marketing campaign that made the USWNT so appealing. Selflessness and team work were key cogs in how the team was marketed to fans, pillars that contrasted the team with 'selfish' and 'greedy' male professional athletes of the time. They were tenets that would be driven home through both marketing campaigns and in media portrayals through the Summer of 1999.

This mindset was crucial considering the target market organizers had set out to capture. The 18-49 age group targeted by men's sporting events was out, and replaced by efforts to hook young soccer players and their families, taking extra effort to appeal to 'soccer dads' who were also used to buying tickets to sporting events. Much of this involved the players being as personable and outgoing as possible to contrast themselves with the detached male professional athletes of the day. Personal appearances across the nation years in advance were the order of the day, while organizers also hammered at their core demographic through media features in young teenage magazines and with carefully crafted media creations and merchandise.

Showing the ability to appeal to a growing and lucrative target audience was key in getting corporate sponsors, previously uninterested in most women's sport and women's soccer in particular, to fully back the effort (Goldman, 1992). Nike's marketing campaign took full advantage of the 'camaraderie' theme, exulting the team's selflessness as a hook to appeal to families and young soccer players. That trait, combined with the very real chance of a win on home soil, prodded other previously reticent sponsors to support the USWNT. The dollars were

important, but the mere image of support from corporate America added an air of legitimacy to the long anonymous USWNT.

The USWNT was also able to win over a previously apathetic media with a sustained charm offensive. The team's strength on the pitch obviously helped, with winners always drawing audiences in American culture, with said success going some way in counteracting the mainstream sport media's typical ignorance of women's sport (Duncan & Messner, 1996; Messner, 2002). For their part, the athletes of the USWNT took full advantage of any platform they were offered, making appearances on late night television and as the subject of numerous personal interest stories in print and electronic media. USWNT players like Julie Foudy and some of the team's mothers played dual roles that appealed to the mainstream American psyche. Foudy played to the ideals of heteronormative femininity that reassured the public and minimized notions of homosexuality that have long dogged women's sport (Griffin, 1998; Griffin, 2002; Kane & Lenskyj, 1996). The mothers saw their motherhood trumpeted with similar aims, appealing to 'middle American values' where a traditional family is seen as a core value (Gill, 2007).

The results were undeniable. The final set television records, not just for women's soccer, but soccer period in the United States, with live attendance records for women's sport also being shattered. The tournament also proved to be a striking financial success, outperforming previous women's sport events, and raking in revenue from ticket sales and sponsorship beyond organizer expectations. The long-term effects were even greater than the immediate shifts in the landscape. There were no longer any questions about the worthiness of the USWNT in terms of live television coverage for major events nor of its ability to stand above other women's sport organizations in drawing corporate patronage. Its athletes were bonafide stars, and their lasting

notoriety set in motion the first truly professional women's club soccer league in the United States.

The 1999 FIFA Women's World Cup success had brought women's soccer, for so long relegated to afterthought status with other women's sport, out from the shadows. Women's sport, including soccer, had been ignored on and off the pitch by the media and the public for decades but was now suddenly back in the limelight after the successful event in the United States (Festle, 1996). Multiple eagle-eyed visionaries saw that success as a jumping off point for a possible lucrative and long lasting professional women's soccer league in the U.S., eventually coming together to create the WUSA.

The roadblocks to the endeavor becoming a successful one were many. Funding for long-term women's sport leagues had always been a thorny subject, with ownership and potential sponsors alike historically reticent to put their money behind a project that would likely see nothing but losses in the short-term (Duncan & Messner, 1996). Even with the staggering audiences on TV and live for the 1999 WWC, there were still questions as to whether the league could retain those interested viewers and sustain momentum. To that point, many questioned as to whether the league could convert a burgeoning participation culture into one that actively cared about a professional women's league.

The initial signs were bright in terms of corporate support and media coverage. Corporate America, seduced by the returns that companies like Nike got with the USWNT in 1999, for once backed women's team sport instead of individual female athletes and tossed their hats into the ring to help bolster the league's early position (Duncan & Hasbrook, 1988; Kane, 1989). The league also was able to negotiate national and local television deals, eschewing the conventional narrative of women's team sport being impossible to find on television outside of the Summer

and Winter Olympics (Messner, 2002). However, this idyllic relationship was short-lived, as television numbers were frighteningly low.

As was the case with the 1999 FIFA WWC, WUSA organizers set much of their marketing efforts towards trying to attract a youth market eager to see 'role models' that stood in stark contrast to the selfish athletes of men's professional sport (Gill, 2007). This involved no shortage of grassroots marketing, which saw athletes actively engage in their communities, further separating them from the detached male professional athlete. The strategy would prove to be short-sighted when all was said and done though, as targeting such a narrow market proved to be a serious folly when the youth and soccer mom market actively turned against the product towards the end of the league's lifespan. Ignoring the 'soccer dad' market the 1999 FIFA WWC organizers catered to, as well as failing to produce a gameday atmosphere that would not alienate older fans proved serious mistakes.

But inevitably, financial mismanagement led to ruin in short order. The league had badly misjudged its ability to bring in revenue, leading to grossly inflated salaries that served as a serious drain on the league's coffers. While sponsorship was brisk early, the lack of support from USWNT partner Nike should have been a major red flag. Nike had been one of women's sport's greatest advocates, even if not for totally egalitarian purposes, and their absence was telling (Goldman, 1992). The microscopic television ratings had led to a move away from bigger cable channels, minimizing visibility and spooking sponsors, who fled in droves. Considering the importance of prime media coverage for both promotional and revenue creation purposes, the move to minor networks was a brutal blow (Coakley, 2009). Moreover, the early barrage of unfettered spending by the league and the clubs dug the enterprise into a massive hole financially. Management had clearly expected revenues to keep pace with the dramatic early

spending, but once the enthusiasm from the 1999 WWC died down, WUSA was left to drown in its sizable debt.

WPS faced the daunting prospect of overcoming skepticism about its hopes of long-term viability given the spectacular failure of the WUSA less than a decade earlier. While the market for women's sport had softened fractionally since the WUSA's demise thanks to the WNBA's dogged longevity, many of the same ills that have plagued women's sport for decades still haunted WPS as it began play in 2009 (Festle, 1996). The startup had none of the enthusiasm of a landmark event behind it like the WUSA had with the 1999 WWC, limiting funding opportunities and lumping the new league into the category of most women's sport leagues struggling financially despite assurances of cost controls (Duncan & Messner, 1996). The league also faced a rough road to closing the traditional media gap with men's leagues, as it struggled for viewers on the fledgling Fox Soccer Channel (Messner, 2002). Adding to the difficulties was the fading star power of the USWNT after the retirement of top stars like Mia Hamm and Michelle Akers, with few proven stars having stepped up to replace them in the limelight.

Media visibility was crucial, with the WUSA having been buried on minor channels after a promising start. WPS never had the chance to shine on a major network to begin with, with its matches airing on Fox Soccer Channel, a network that had limited reach. Whereas rights fees have played a major role in funding men's sport leagues, WPS actually gave up some of their advertising revenue with the channel, in essence paying to be on television and robbing the league of vital revenue. The trade-off was a harsh one, with the league being crippled financially despite getting necessary exposure. However, one has to question if the deal was worth it for the league in the long-term, as they were only getting one televised match a week on the network.

Any possible television revenue from a rights deal would have been a boon for the league, which struggled to attract reticent sponsors that had been burned by the WUSA. Clubs missed sponsorship targets, and the league as a whole struggled to bring in big name sponsors that had thrown their weight behind the WUSA in its early days. Local sponsorship was in flux throughout the WPS' existence, but it seldom reached levels to sustain most teams. As the management situation of the league became more frayed, sponsors ended up fleeing in droves, stretching league and club coffers to the breaking point.

Though WPS owners assured the public that they had learned from WUSA's mistakes, actions proved otherwise in large part. The blatant pandering to the youth market that had hardly served the WUSA well was alive and in full effect for WPS, even if the league and its clubs had dialed back some of the atmospheric touches that had alienated older audiences in the WUSA. The league clearly believed in grassroots initiatives previously indicated by Zhang et al. (2003) as being effective in building affect but at the price of limiting horizons elsewhere in search of a market. While the league's television deal enabled it to reach more male viewers, the target market was still clearly soccer playing youths and soccer moms, with the league playing up the 'role model' card so common for women's sport (Gill, 2007). WPS officials spoke of trying to reach a more dedicated 'hardcore' brand of soccer fan whose devotion would ensure repeat patronage, but efforts to reach these fans were haphazard and half-hearted. Although not overt, the homophobia that had cast a dark shadow upon women's sport and women's soccer still lingered, as efforts to cater to a willing Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) audience were also virtually non-existent (Griffin, 2002; Kane & Lenskyj, 1996).

Broadly though, the league's chaotic management undermined most of its marketing efforts. The abrupt folding of the Saint Louis franchise in 2010 likely shook confidence in the

league, while the desperate sale of the previously respected Washington franchise to Dan Borislow a season later represented a nadir for professional women's soccer, as the new owner's boorish behavior effectively scared away remaining possible investors. Borislow also alienated the media with his behavior, another fatal mistake considering said media's importance for the image of an organization (Nichols et al., 2002). Beyond the changes in ownership, the constant reshuffling and elimination of personnel presented anything but a united front for a league desperate to not appear to be desperately shedding payroll to stay afloat.

Ultimately, WPS' most lasting contribution in terms of women's soccer marketing may be its use of social media. With women's soccer, like other women's sport, still facing an uphill climb to capture the mainstream sport media's attention, social media represented a way to close the gap. The league's clubs successfully exploited platforms like Twitter and Facebook to both deliver information to fans, as well as to receive instant feedback about the product. While social media is now a crucial tenet of every major sporting club and league's marketing strategy now, WPS was one of the first leagues to use it to great effect.

Most have laid the demise of WPS at Borislow's feet, but the reality is a bit more complicated than that. The league's failure to register any growth in the mainstream media and improve on a disadvantageous ad revenue sharing deal was an anchor around the league's feet that became inescapable once sponsors lost confidence in the league. What successes the league did have in terms of media growth, such as social media, were quickly undermined by erratic management and budget cuts. A blinkered and non-progressive stance towards attracting new fans also severely cut into growth potential. The madness of Borislow simply ruined what was left of WPS' sinking reputation, one that had been on a downward trek for some time. Inevitably,

WPS' demise had as much to do with a lack of imagination as much as it did the machinations of one man.

Conclusion

The purpose of this paper was to examine the history of marketing of women's soccer in the United States both through the U.S. women's national team (USWNT) and through the first two professional club leagues, the WUSA and WPS. Specifically, it sought to find explanations as to why the USWNT was such a success beginning with the 1999 Women's World Cup and why the WUSA and WPS were not able to replicate that success.

There were numerous factors precipitating the swift rise and maintained success of the USWNT. The team had a bankable superstar in the form of Mia Hamm, who was marketed to the max to a receptive audience, starring in commercials with Michael Jordan and giving U.S. Soccer a commodity with which they could sell their product. Hamm and her teammates recognized the need to reach audiences through grassroots efforts, connecting directly with fans at youth tournaments, sporting goods stores, and other personal appearances to both sell themselves and the product. Organizers behind the USWNT and the 1999 Women's World Cup also targeted specific media to appeal to a young audience, featuring in non-sporting magazines that were popular with young girls. Perhaps most helpful of all was the ability of the team to work with major sponsors like Nike that produced powerful ad campaigns for the team, giving the USWNT exposure it simply lacked before while showing the public the ethos of the team. The mass media giving the team a chance and painting a compelling narrative in the Summer of 1999 also pushed the team to new heights.

While the WUSA (and later WPS) did its best to take the lessons of the USWNT to heart and connect with a potential fanbase at a grassroots level, there were also numerous failings that

did the league in. The lack of a major apparel sponsor such as Nike or Reebok robbed the league of both dollars and exposure that the former had provided so effectively for the USWNT. The lack of Nike backing essentially crippled any hopes of cross-promotion between the WUSA and the still popular USWNT. Additionally, the league's overt focus towards capturing the youth market and 'soccer moms' limited its horizons and stifled its upside in market growth, with the league pandering to a fanbase that found the league uncool. The USWNT had also tried to appeal to soccer dads for the 1999 Women's World Cup, a market all but ignored by WUSA, with the atmosphere at games a major turn-off for older fans. An inability to retain sponsors and an eroding television package sent the league into a death spiral that saw the league hit bottom after its third season.

WPS suffered greatly from the absence of recognized star power in women's soccer after the retirement of Hamm and others from the 1999 USWNT team. While the mass media's support had largely boosted the USWNT during the 1999 Women's World Cup and had at least given WUSA a fighting chance, a disadvantageous television deal crippled WPS out of the gate, seeing valuable advertising revenue split with Fox Soccer Channel, a move which kept revenue down. The league and its clubs also failed to market effectively to a male audience, instead settling for the young, female audience that WUSA targeted. Marketing campaigns were often haphazard and inconsistent, while sponsors were smaller than those supporting WUSA had been and abandoned ship at the earliest sign of trouble following the third season. When the league did seem to get it right with marketing, such as in building a social media audience, they often made baffling decisions later to undercut those gains, such as letting new media manager Amanda Vandervoort leave. Management squabbles caused corporate supporters and fans to lose

faith in the league, while litigation drained what was left in the coffers of the league, causing its inevitable closure.

Managerial Implications

With a third professional league, the National Women's Soccer League (NWSL), having begun play in 2013, it is clear that the the successes and failures of marketing women's soccer in the United States has serious implications on the stakeholders of the new league. Another failure of a league would be a crippling blow to the future of women's soccer in the United States, meaning the lessons of the past must be heeded for the best chance of success.

While the NWSL has, like the WUSA and WPS, tried to emulate the grassroots marketing strategy of the USWNT that was so successful in 1999, it is also clear from the failure of the two previous leagues that this is not enough. The pro leagues' inability to create and market a star like Mia Hamm greatly limited the impact the league would have with the public while limiting chances for tie-ins with sponsors that could provide invaluable visibility. Getting those sponsors, like Nike, on-board will be crucial for the success of the new league. A lack of a tie-in like that crippled the WUSA, while Puma's pull out in WPS all but doomed that league. Beyond appealing to corporate backers, this study shows that appealing to strictly a young, female audience is unlikely to be successful in the long-term. Though funds may be limited and mass media channels may be reticent to cover the league, it must nonetheless find way to reach a broad audience. With potential difficulties in procuring a television deal as an unproven commodity, any new league must work to find creative solutions, potentially through new media, to help attract fans and sponsors for the long haul.

Limitations

Though this study provided a thorough review of the marketing history of women's soccer in the United States through different incarnations of the sport, there were a few notable limitations to this study. Official league documentation for the WUSA and WPS was virtually impossible to come by given the passage of time between the leagues' shuttering and this study. Few meaningful official records were kept electronically by the WUSA, while domain rights for most content associated with WPS have long since expired. The researcher did everything in his power to compensate for these absences via a detailed review of all available third-party sources of information regarding the league. Additionally, the time period between the USWNT's 1999 triumph and their resurgence in the Summer of 2011 also was sparsely documented. Further investigation and studies could potentially add more clarity to the marketing context within that decade.

Future Directions

While this study examined many of the marketing factors that contributed to the success of the 1999 FIFA Women's World Cup and the USWNT's rise during that time period, the marketing failures before that competition that stunted the team's growth and some of the struggles after 1999 for the USWNT still need to be examined in greater detail to shine a light on the evolution of the marketing of women's soccer since that event. Considering the tremendous success of the USWNT in the 2011 FIFA Women's World Cup and the 2012 Summer Olympics, a study of how U.S. Soccer successfully positioned the USWNT in the public eye after nearly a decade of malaise would be helpful for practitioners.

Additionally, the birth of a third professional women's soccer league, the National Women's Soccer League (NWSL), affords new opportunities to examine marketing practices

within women's soccer. Future studies could build off the analysis within this study and examine the marketing practices within the NWSL to compare and contrast the marketing of the newest professional women's league with some of its predecessors to see if it has learned from the failures of first two professional leagues and how marketing has evolved with the advent of new forms of media and communication. Further studies could additionally detail any possible synergy between the marketing of the USWNT and the NWSL, as previous leagues have endured somewhat fractured relationships over the years.

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CHAPTER 5

ARTICLE #2 – FEMINIST THEMES IN NWSL CLUB MARKETING

Conceived in the second half of 2012 and beginning play in 2013, the National Women's Soccer League (NWSL) is the third modern attempt in the United States of the formation of a professional women's soccer league in the country. While there were a multitude of factors that contributed to the demise of the Women's United Soccer Association (WUSA) and Women's Professional Soccer (WPS) over the past decade, financial mismanagement and a lack of marketing nous was chief amongst the culprits (Grainey, 2012; Dure, 2013). As has been the case with other women's sport leagues, viability and visibility has been difficult to come by, creating an unstable business environment.

Puzzlingly, participation in women's soccer has flourished among youths, enjoying booming participation numbers for the last quarter century, while the United States' Women's National Team (USWNT) has consistently drawn the attention of both major sponsors and spectators, who have turned the team into a major draw (Lisi, 2013). This disconnect has created a situation where players for the USWNT have often been able to collect lucrative endorsements and healthy salaries from U.S. Soccer but have toiled in obscurity for club leagues in the U.S. which have sprung up and folded ad nauseam. Professional players without a spot on the USWNT have not been so fortunate, playing for meagre salaries and occasionally being forced to take on part-time jobs to make ends meet (Dure, 2013).

While the USWNT's rise to fame in 1999 and subsequent revival in fortunes in the Summers of 2011 and 2012 captured media and fan attention, research into the rise of the team has been mostly anecdotal and scattered. Christopherson, Janning, and McConnell's (2002) study was the most high profile study conducted on the rise of the USWNT during the 1999 Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) Women's World Cup, but it largely dwelled on thematic analysis of media coverage of the event instead of how the team and the event was marketed and sold by event organizers. Subsequent examinations have been virtually non-existent, which seems unfathomable given the team's rise back into the spotlight within the past half-decade.

Just as interesting has been the complete lack of study into the failure of either of the first two professional women's soccer leagues, the WUSA and WPS. A study by Jowdy and McDonald (2003) examined a single event early in the lifespan of the league from a pure marketing perspective, while further studies were absent as the league began to decline. Studies into the failures of WPS were completely non-existent, with the narrative of the rise and fall of the league being constructed almost entirely anecdotally. As the USWNT was rising back into the spotlight towards the end of WPS' existence, such a gap in enquiry is glaring.

Though a good deal of the research was undertaken over a decade ago, there have been numerous instances of feminist themed research into women's soccer worldwide (e.g., Caudwell, 1999; Christopherson et al., 2002; Elling, 1999; Knoppers & Anthonissen, 2003; Martinez, 2008; Scraton, Fasting, Pfister, & Bunuel, 1999). Some issues involving the intertwining of feminist theory and women's soccer that researchers have examined have included a continuing and pervasive inequity in resources and coverage between men's and women's soccer, the use of sexualization and an ideal of heteronormative femininity to sell women's soccer, and the

stigmatization of those who participate but don't fit that heteronormative mold (Caudwell, 1999; Cox & Thompson, 2004; Knoppers & Anthonissen, 2004; Williams, 2004). While the rise of the internet has opened up the women's game for consumption and discussion by increasingly devoted fanbases, research into the game along feminist theoretical lines has not kept pace with this growth nor with the continuing evolution of how the game is sold, presented, and consumed.

This is especially true of professional women's leagues in the United States, where research into marketing practices and potential connections with feminist themes have gone unexamined through the birth and death of the WUSA and WPS, as well as through the first two years of the NWSL. While there have been notable retrospective, anecdotal glances at the failure of WUSA and fragmented examinations of the rise and fall of WPS, there was no systematic enquiry into the dynamics of the marketing of either league through a feminist lens, instead blaming the failure of each essentially on bad business practices (Grainey, 2012). Early examinations of the NWSL have also tended to be anecdotal with a view towards looking at marketing in terms of dollars and cents while largely ignoring the rationale and greater themes of marketing decisions from the teams and the league as a whole (Dure, 2013). Feminist enquiry into other women's sport endeavors have laid the groundwork for both explanations of successes and failures as well as offering cogent policy recommendations to ease stakeholders onto a path towards prosperity. Similar research into the NWSL could do the same, highlighting how the nascent league is succeeding, as well as steps it can take to improve its fortunes.

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to examine and explain the marketing of the clubs of the National Women's Soccer League (NWSL) and the league as a whole through feminist themes, using case settings of five of the league's clubs to better understand how clubs and the league have used these feminist themes to market their product. Feminist themes have been used

to dissect and critique societal inequities, including within sport, to minimize and eventually eliminate these differences. Thus, examining the NWSL through these feminist lenses will allow for a necessary evaluation of the inequities within American sport, and specifically American women's soccer, for generations. Additionally, this study seeks to compare and contrast these marketing practices with that of prior leagues to examine similarities and differences to track the evolution of marketing through feminist themes in women's soccer.

This study consists of the identification of three specific feminist themes that have been common in women's sport, including in the marketing of women's sport, and the roles those themes have played in the marketing of the NWSL and its clubs. A case study with five settings was used to identify and compare and contrast the use of feminist themes in the marketing of five different clubs within the NWSL. This research provides a much needed addition to the current sport management literature by examining the marketing of professional women's soccer through feminist themes, specifically the effects of an inequity of rules, resources, and coverage on marketing strategies; the embracing of motherhood, family values, and role models while shunning the 'other' and how that has changed recently; and the use of ideal heteronormative femininity to construct a consumption community.

This chapter first provides a brief look at feminist theory, gender theory, and gender barriers and their relation to sport. Next, a more specific framework built around three major feminist themes that have been common in the marketing of sport are briefly discussed. This is followed by details of the study's findings on the use of feminist themes in marketing by NWSL clubs, as well as a discussion to contextualize the findings with previous literature and research into the marketing of women's soccer through feminist themes. Finally, concluding thoughts, managerial implications, and potential future directions for research are provided.

Feminism in Sport

Definitions of feminism have been deconstructed and constructed for decades while branching out into the realm of gender theory. The growth of feminism over the past half-century has largely been built on a foundation of what feminism actually means, with the concept often meaning something different entirely to two different people who declare themselves feminists (McRobbie, 2009). This has made it hard to define ‘feminism’ as a single construct, but Birrell (2000) argues that this constant debate is what has helped empower feminism as a strong, deep theory. Feminism has usually been divided into three distinct ‘waves’ by scholars, each in a distinct time period and with its own political and social reality.

First-wave feminism largely applied to the common cause of women’s suffrage, emerging at the heart of the industrial revolution during a surge of more liberalized politics (Heywood, 1997; Madsen, 2000). Second-wave feminism largely took hold in the 1970s and 1980s with a premise of sex and gender being distinct (Butler, 1993). However, second-wave feminism eventually came under heavy criticism for homogenising the experience of women into a one-size-fits-all mold, while ignoring important factors such as race, sexuality, and class in molding the experience of different strata of women (Evans, 1995).

The 1990s brought third-wave feminism to the fore, with Judith Butler, among other things, seeking to bring the above complicating factors into focus when examining the struggles of women in achieving equality. Many of the class of third-wave feminists had become disenchanted with a perception of gains towards equality being overtly tilted to white, middle-class women while minority groups still suffered (Caudwell, 2011). This line of inquiry also notes that oppression does not just come from men but from racism, homophobia, and income

inequality that cuts across gender lines and condemns both men and women as contributing to struggles.

Feminist viewpoints have often argued that the sport industry ascribes to strict binary gender classification, promoting an intractable sense of male superiority (Shaw, 2006). The feminist goal of equity between the genders has, for decades, been hostilely opposed by a male hegemony resistant to change from the status quo. Messner (2002) notes that male dominance is upheld by a “gender regime of sport,” where these power brokers “maintain and promote male hegemony in sport” (p. 65). In Messner’s eyes, equity between the genders in sport is actively resisted by rigid institutions in sport that stonewall with separate and unequal rules, gaps in funding, and a stark difference in opportunity.

At the same time though, feminist theory’s primary goal of equality has still been felt through policy that has levelled the playing field for sport in general and, specifically, women’s soccer. Worldwide, but especially in North America and Europe, women’s soccer players have benefitted from legislation that has offered up more opportunity, including Title IX in the United States (Caudwell, 2011). Beyond just offering up chances for women as a whole, third-wave feminist goals have also been advanced with efforts to stamp out racism and homophobia within sport and football.

Gender Theory

Gender can be seen as a central facet on feminism and feminist studies (Caudwell, 2011). Caudwell notes that to the regular person, gender often “denotes biological differences between women and men” (p. 331-332). However, Butler (1990) has previously argued that gender is not inscribed on us but socially constructed by performing gender, in effect ‘doing’ masculinity and femininity. Butler (1993) claims that “the regulatory norms of ‘sex’ work in a performative

fashion to constitute the materiality of bodies,” through “reiterative and citational practice” (p. 2).

Roth and Basow (2004) claim that "sexed bodies are constructed through the activities we do continually, often without conscious thought" (p. 246). Beyond this construction, however, the differences in masculinity and femininity have been emphasized, with the construction and perpetuation of the former being lauded by the hegemony, while the construction and perpetuation of the latter has been seen as ‘lesser’ by hegemonic forces. This dichotomy is reflected throughout the building blocks of society on a daily basis.

Many feminists have argued that traditional heteronormative constructions of femininity have only served to perpetuate inequality and denote the bodies of those not conforming as illegitimate (Butler, 1993). These feminists have argued that this framework of heteronormative femininity has been erected by a patriarchally obsessed society, with men in positions of power using popular culture such as movies, television, and the internet to empower a picture of what a ‘desirable’ woman looks like: young, thin, white, heterosexual, and voluptuous (Gill, 2007). This image is then disseminated daily to the population at large and used to sell products to women now under pressure to ‘do’ heteronormative femininity with the aid of these products, helping them conform to this pervasive standard as a pathway to success, creating a consumption community (Goldman, 1992).

One area of society that has served as a pedestal to exalt the superiority/inferiority male/female dichotomy is sport (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Bryson (1987) claims that the masculine hegemony underpinning sport has “negative evaluations of women’s capacities” deep within it (p. 350). Messner (1992) notes that sport has historically been used as a male preserve, where males can bond with each other, friend-to-friend, father-to-son, as well as establish their

masculinity and distance themselves from the unwanted stigma of ‘being feminine’. The creation of these ‘female-free zones’ allows men to create affirming identities separate from the looked down upon ‘feminine’ identity (Fields, 2006).

Burstyn (1999) has argued that gendered order has been maintained by men wielding the power at the helm of the sport industry for generations. Many of the main foundational men’s sport leaders “condition and inform the constitution of the gendered social order and its dominant ideology” (p. 22). Threats to this ‘normative’ social order and its ideology are often questioned, ostracized, and purged by those bent on maintaining the status quo and the power that comes with that status quo at the expense of progressive steps towards equality between the genders.

Gender Barriers

Throughout society, male hegemonic forces have worked to establish notions of what is right and proper behavior and attitudes for and about the different genders. Within a sporting context, this includes what types of sport and played by which genders are ‘important’ and worth funding and following. Farrell, Fink, and Fields (2011) found that men are the dominant force in influencing not just these decisions in other men but in women as well. Men’s sport is pictured as the only important sport, to the point that supporting men’s sport feels ‘right’ and the natural thing to do.

These researchers often found that even when engaging in sport spectatorship and fandom with men, women were often treated as the ‘other’, as not at the level of men in their fandom (De Beauvoir, 1972). Men are regarded as “being the sources of knowledge” in terms of sport, no matter the fandom or credentials of women (p. 195). Women are often excluded from conversation about sport by men or have their knowledge of sport marginalized and/or trivialized by their male counterparts. Such attitudes can have a chilling effect for women, who may be as

knowledgeable as men about sport, but who may fear reprisals and ridicule for speaking up with their opinions and knowledge.

Besides placing social pressure on women that explicitly and implicitly denote men's sport as the only important type of sport, men at the levers of power have tried to sweep women's sport to the margins by not providing media coverage of women's sports teams and devoting less money towards marketing women's sports teams. Within the media, 'sport' has typically been framed and understood solely as 'men's sport', with women's sport never being referred to without the gendered language signifier, essentially regarding 'sport' as 'men's sport' by default (Blinde, Greendorfer, & Shanker, 1991). When women's sport has been covered by the media, the breadth and depth of coverage has paled in comparison to men's sport (Christopherson et al., 2002; Duncan & Messner, 1996; Messner, 2002). Much of the narrative beyond the actions of the game itself, so common to the men's game, are lost in the women's game (Festle, 1996)

Part of this process of societal construction has enabled the hegemonic patriarchy to establish boundaries of what is and is not proper activities and behaviors in terms of participation in sport for each gender. Such barriers have been erected in soccer, notably in the twentieth century across many continents. The ludicrous rationale given in Germany upon a temporary ban of women playing the sport was that "The attractiveness of women, their bodies, and souls will suffer irreparable damage and the public display of their bodies will offend morality and decency" (Grainey, 2012, p. 202).

Caudwell (1999) notes that gender frontiers have proven to be "clearly marked, apparently impermeable and prevalent," while concluding that these frontiers have been "socially and culturally constructed and maintained" (p. 401). Additionally, the above study found that

once people, including female soccer players, attempt to cross these constructed boundaries, they are often subject to “stereotyping, prejudice, harassment, and abuse” (p.401).

Theoretical Framework

The following section offers a brief overview into three predominant feminist marketing themes that have featured into women’s sport and, specifically, women’s soccer marketing in the past and which still play an important role in current marketing of women’s soccer. The presented themes have been commonly found in previous examinations of relationship between feminism and sport (Burstyn, 1999; Caudwell, 1999; Kane & Lenskyj, 1996; Messner, 2002) and their absence in examinations of women’s soccer contexts in the United States may be obscuring potential explanations as to the marketing failures and successes and strategies of NWSL clubs, as well as those of leagues before.

Inequity of rules, resources, and coverage. Historically, women have been subject to a multitude of pernicious myths meant to discourage them from taking part in athletic endeavors such as soccer. Tacitly, social barriers were erected to separate women from sport, disenfranchising them, while men were glamorized instead of ostracized. De Varona (2004) identified some common myths used as barriers to participation in sport: (a) participating in sport will make women unfeminine, (b) participating in elite sport will harm women’s reproductive organs and will result in the inability to produce children, (c) women do not need to learn about the lessons of life on the playing fields of sport, but men do; (d) women will never be accepted as real athletes, because they are not as strong, fast, and muscular as men are; (e) women athletes will never be as popular as male athletes; therefore, they will not attract audiences large enough to make women’s sport financially profitable and viable; and (f) women are not as interested in sport as men are; therefore, opportunities should not be wasted on them.

Participation in sports at youth and college levels by young girls skyrocketed as many of the above myths concerning female participation in sports were debunked. In particular, De Varona (2004), among others, found that women's participation in sport had many positive side effects attached to it:

1. Girls and women who participate in sport are less likely to abuse drugs, suffer from depression, and/or engage in self-destructive behaviour.
2. Girls and women who participate in sport are more likely to complete high school studies and strive for higher education.
3. Women who compete in sport are more likely to lead productive and successful lives.
4. Women who exercise are less likely to suffer from osteoporosis and cancer. (p. 9-10)

The profligation of these facts has helped depower many of the myths that had kept women from the game, going some way in bridging the participation gap between boys and girls which had developed as a consequence of those myths.

When myths did not work, those in power moved to limit opportunity. A study conducted by Scraton et al. (1999) in England found that many young women claimed they were not allowed to play soccer at school, instead being diverted into more 'sex-appropriate' activities. Limiting opportunity also meant making players jump through enormous financial hoops to just fund opportunities to play. In New Zealand, players ran marathons, held car washes, and even went into pubs to kiss patrons for handouts to raise the necessary money needed for tournament travel, with fundraising being "part and parcel of being a female soccer player" (Cox & Thompson, 2004, p. 215). Globally, even elite female players have had to take part-time jobs at times just to make ends meet, as player pay was perilously low even for international competitions.

Beyond myth making and myth breaking and financial constraints, sometimes governing bodies were loath to treat men and women's players equally. In a humiliatingly paternalistic and condescending move, FIFA ruled that matches at the first Women's World Cup would only last eighty minutes instead of the customary ninety in men's games, because of a belief that "women did not have the stamina to play a full ninety minutes like men" (Lisi, 2013, p. 2). It would not be the last time FIFA meddled with notions of equality in the rulebook for men and women, as the organizing body briefly gave credence to an idea for the 1999 FIFA Women's World Cup that the ball should be slightly deflated so that it would not 'hurt' the players and would be easier to control (Longman, 2001).

In the United States, gradual growth had been the name of the game for the better part of a century until the advent of Title IX of the Education Amendments Act, which changed the game forever by increasing opportunities for women exponentially once passed in 1972 (Ladda, 2000). The law provided a whole new world of opportunities for women in athletics, as schools had to adjust their budgets to fit the ratio of male and female athletes in their athletic programs (Grainey, 2012). This included opportunities at younger ages in youth soccer, as opposed to other countries, where gender equality was a mere afterthought (Christopherson et al., 2002).

The United States women's national team (USWNT) found itself frequently underfunded and largely seen as an afterthought in its early years. The team's annual budget during those formative years was a paltry one hundred seventy-five thousand dollars (Lisi, 2013). It was a difficult existence, with players unable to obtain more lucrative full-time jobs outside of soccer, knowing employers would not wait up when they were away with the USWNT (Grainey, 2012).

Media coverage in those early days for the USWNT was also largely absent. Fortunato (2000) has stated that the media has a strong influence on how events, organizations, and

individuals are perceived by the public. Coverage of the U.S. men's national team outstripped that of its female counterpart for decades, with only highlights being shown of the USWNT's 1996 win at the Atlanta Summer Olympics. The USWNT and women's soccer in general wouldn't receive a big media push until the 1999 Women's World Cup, where every game was broadcast by ABC and two ESPN networks (De Varona, 2004). A media not used to covering women's sports outside of the Olympic Games was slow to respond, but in newspapers that did cover the tournament, Women's World Cup storylines dominated the sports pages during the dog days of Summer, while an increasingly enthralled nation tuned in, with forty million viewers watching on television (Longman, 1999a).

However, there have been arguments that media coverage of women's sports, the 1999 Women's World Cup included, relied on a "highly stereotypical feminized view, one that tends to sexualize, commodify, trivialize, and devalue (through marginalization) women's sporting accomplishments" (Kane & Greendorfer, 1994, p. 36). Some have claimed that the media sexualizes female athletes, emphasizing physical and sexual differences from men and downplaying actual accomplishments on the field of play (Duncan, 1990; Duncan & Messner, 1996, 2000; Jones, Murrell, & Jackson, 1999). A study of the coverage of the 1999 Women's World Cup found that reporters "actively promoted, constructed or perpetuated certain gender ideologies, which contributed to the popularity of the event" (Christopherson et al., 2002, p. 178).

While the public still seemed very much engaged with the exploits of the USWNT after the 1999 Women's World Cup, the team still struggled with equality in recognition from their own federation. Men's national team accomplishments were still listed above the women's World Cup win in publications, while highlights of the USWNT's triumph were also curiously

absent from end of year retrospectives. They were slights that were to continue for over a decade until the team's return to the limelight in the summer of 2011 (Grainey, 2012).

Embracing motherhood, family values, and role models while shunning the “other”.

While sociological factors propping up the rise in popularity of youth soccer as a whole in the United States as well as in the popularity of the USWNT has been written about in great length, recent changes to the narrative have gone largely unexamined within professional women's soccer. Whereas previous authors (e.g., Knoppers & Anthonissen, 2004; Martinez, 2008) have noted how ‘middle America’ ideals have been cherished in soccer circles in America, they have also noted how behavior deviating from a traditionally feminine, heterosexual norm has been shunned, ignored, and ostracized. Recently however, homophobia has been confronted and countered by many within women's soccer, both through players, officials, and fans. These new steps have gone largely ignored in research, with this study seeking to build on previous narratives with these new developments.

Cultivating a wholesome, ‘All-American’ image for the USWNT has been key for promotion and marketing purposes for the better part of a decade and a half, beginning with the 1999 Women's World Cup that vaulted the team to fame. The USWNT were described by some as a “safe-sexy picture of bouncy femininity” (Longman, 2001, p. 41). It was theorized that part of the marketing success of the Women's World Cup came about from its perpetuation of “a particularly narrow definition of feminism - one that excludes variation in terms of race, class, and sexual orientation” (Christopherson et al., 2002, p. 172).

Homophobia has been described as a powerful political weapon of sexism, with the label of being a lesbian used as a marker to “define the boundaries of acceptable female behavior in a patriarchal culture” (Griffin, 2002, p. 194). Those who admitted homosexuality and who refused

to conform to those boundaries saw endorsement opportunities vanish (Longman, 2001). Festle (1996) claims that male sexuality in sport goes unexamined as sport confirms their masculinity, but that sport calls into question women's 'heterosexual femininity'.

Kane and Lenskyj (1996) argue that "homophobic representations of female athletes, most notably the symbolic erasure of women who participate in sports traditionally considered a male preserve, play a central role in perpetuating male sporting hegemony" (p. 200). Being called a lesbian, especially in sport, has been seen as being the victim of an act of intimidation, with some women in sport feeling sensitive and vulnerable to the use of the term, as much of women's sport has been stereotyped as a 'lesbian activity' in the eyes of many (Grainey, 2012).

The specter of homophobia still lingered over women's soccer in the U.S. despite its growing popularity. Some claimed that the necessity of presenting women athletes as heterosexual had little to do with soccer and more to do with a prevailing air of homophobia permeating much of American sport (Griffin, 1998; Hargreaves, 2000; Knoppers & Anthonissen, 2003). For much of the twentieth century, sports figures have denied the existence of lesbianism by underlining heterosexual normality, specifically the existence of motherhood, boyfriends, husbands, and babies (Longman, 2001). Marketing and media coverage of the USWNT diverged away from any possible implications of homosexuality, using sex appeal to promote women's empowerment and in being good role models (Christopherson et al., 2002). Such decisions were also undertaken in the general promotion of the 1999 Women's World Cup.

The USWNT was not portrayed as 'less feminine, or more lesbian, than non-athletes,' a portrayal which Lipsyte (1999) framed as being 'normal', proper role models for young girls who also happen to form a very lucrative consumption community. Lipsyte (1999) also posited that it was necessary for the team to dispel any notion of homosexuality that often was used to

stifle women athletes if they were to successfully market themselves. Joy Fawcett and Carla Overbeck were fawned over by the press as ‘true soccer moms’ raising kids while trying to play soccer (Grainey, 2012). The media’s tactics of “trumpeting the soccer-mom angle” came under fire from feminists though, as they argued that such a narrative “reinforced the notion that a woman must be heterosexual and attractive to be a successful and accepted athlete” (Longman, 2001, p. 139).

It has been said that the simultaneous portrayal of the USWNT as “tough, strong, and muscular” while also being “nice, feminine, American women” was a big part of what attracted the general public to the team (Christopherson et al., 2002, p. 182). The latter effectively appealed to families, while the former played upon a theme of female empowerment that was appealing to many women at large. The above also argued however that the media may not have just been playing towards attracting families and women though, as they also controlled the message, celebrating “individual achievements within a group-oriented heterosexual, middle and upper-class white context,” that assuaged male fears of a potential upheaval in the hierarchal order while simultaneously “[appealing] to the hopes of women” (p. 184).

A theme of camaraderie and togetherness also seemed to resonate in the marketing and presentation of the U.S. women’s national team before and during the 1999 FIFA Women’s World Cup, most prominently shown in Nike’s ‘I Will Have Two Fillings’ television advertisement, where USWNT players get matching fillings as a show of unity when one player needs the fillings. It was an ad that clearly resonated with the public and became a famous ad for this generation of soccer fan (Longman, 2001). These themes were often repeated in media coverage and marketing material, generating a narrative that increased the team’s popularity and contributed to the team’s status as role models.

The campaign may have fit into a narrative of “stereotypically feminine qualities”, such as “selflessness, modesty, and desire for harmony” that some argue helped the team’s surge in popularity, though some argued that those traits are not typically associated with a theme of empowerment (Christopherson et al., 2002, p. 178-179). “Sacrifice, loyalty and teamwork” were suddenly en vogue as opposed to the usual trappings of professional sport such as statistics and standings (Longman, 2001, p. 174).

Ideal heteronormative femininity and a consumption community. Much has been made in academia and beyond of the construction of an ideal heteronormative feminine identity by the hegemony. In large part, this construction has served the needs of corporate interests, allowing for the shaping and manipulation of purchasing habits as women seek to conform to this notion of ideal heteronormative femininity. Sport, along with other entertainment avenues, have been eager and active participants in the construction of this ‘consumption community’, with entities often eagerly accepting an exchange of cash or other considerations for access to lucrative consumer markets. Women’s soccer has been no different in this regard, with its purveyors and participants often pushed as or encouraged to function as the ideal heteronormatively feminine role model to be aspired towards.

Ideal masculinity is constructed through ideals of physical strength, large, hulking stature, and through aggression. By contrast, feminine ideals are seen as being "beautiful, small, thin, and, perhaps most importantly weak" (Roth & Basow, 2004, p. 249). To meet this ideal, women often diet, exercise, remove hair, and use make-up (Bartky, 1998). Masculine and feminine ideals are transmitted through family, religion, the workplace, and the media to the point that being ‘feminine’ or ‘masculine’ becomes a key for the identity of women and men (Bartky, 1998; Roth & Basow, 2004).

Wolf (1991) argues that women (and men) are encouraged to look certain ways, because meeting the masculine and feminine ideals of society at large takes money used to purchase products and use services. McCaughey (1997) claims that sport may be a way of fueling capitalist needs by selling products to new markets and not as a tool of liberation for repressed groups. Goldman (1992) refers to this as ‘commodity feminism’, with advertisers using visual touches to make distinct styles that allow women and men to ‘do’ feminism and masculinity as they please.

Despite the destruction of many myths, Carl Cannon claimed that people expect women to play competitive sports like men but still “retain some of the traditional notions of femininity,” in the process (Grainey, 2012, p. 174). To conform with societal norms, women athletes must be ‘both strong and soft,’ to negotiate the dichotomy of strong athlete and patriarchal definitions of femininity (Hargreaves, 1986; Markula, 1995). In effect, women athletes must play the sport like men with power and tenacity, but also retain their femininity to be acceptable to the hegemonic forces in power (Christopherson et al., 2002).

While some companies’ devotion towards promotion of women’s sport and advertisement targeting women has been commendable, others have ascribed a more nefarious motive towards said efforts. Instead of breaking through patriarchal gender norms, critics like Goldman (1992) have argued that giant conglomerates such as Nike are merely interested in the bottom line, namely increasing their profits. The media has often shown favor towards physically attractive athletes regardless of skill, emphasizing and exploiting heteronormative femininity at will (Grau, Roselli, & Taylor, 2007; Spencer & McClung, 2001).

Advertisements have typically played into heteronormative ideals of femininity, including ‘traditional’ heterosexual roles for women while also targeting selling products for

women with female athlete endorsers (Cuneen, 2001; Cuneen & Spencer, 2003; Lumpkin, 2007; Lynn, Walsdorf, Hardin, & Hardin, 2002; McGinnis, Chun, & McQuillan, 2003). Sports that emphasize traditional femininity such as ice skating and gymnastics, have often been most popular with marketers in the past (Duncan & Hasbrook, 1988; Kane, 1988, 1999; McGinnis et al, 2003).

Some advertisements for the 1999 Women's World Cup that flaunted USWNT members' traditional femininity and heterosexuality in an attempt to appeal to the heterosexual male demographic were met with mixed reactions. One of the most talked about advertisements featuring a USWNT player fitting this description involved Brandi Chastain, who posed "crouched behind a soccer ball wearing only her cleats and her rippling muscles," in a spread that appeared in *Gear* magazine (Markovits and Hellerman, 2004, p. 27). While the advertisement naturally drew the attention of the masses, even those uninterested in soccer, opinions varied as to the merit of such an ad towards promoting the game.

As had been the case with the WUSA, WPS touted the traditional femininity of its players in various ways. League outfitter Puma introduced uniforms that, in their words, 'Fuse Performance with Fashion, Bold Color and Feminine Flair' but which were panned by many (Sigi, 2009b). It was likewise with hot pink goalkeeper shirts, not popular with some of the players, including outspoken goalkeeper Hope Solo. Some of the features produced by teams also blatantly pandered towards promoting players' heterosexuality, such as Boston's 'Battle of the Brides' featurette, which saw some of the team's players trying on wedding dresses.

Methodology

The purpose of this study was to examine the marketing of professional women's soccer through themes of feminism. In this research, a case study involving interviews of marketing

officials of the NWSL of their experiences in marketing professional women's soccer was conducted to analyze their perspective and experiences in dealing with feminist issues in addition to the researcher's collection of archival material, including league and team press releases and print and electronic media marketing artifacts. For further information on this approach and the settings of this case study, please refer to: Chapter 3, Page 39.

Five interviews were conducted with NWSL marketing managers in the Summer of 2014. Interviews took between twenty-two and ninety-five minutes. More specific details on each interview can be found in the table in Appendix E.

Research context. An effective way to examine feminist themes is through qualitative interviews with stakeholders (Alasuutari, Bickman, & Brannen, 2008). In a women's soccer marketing context, this was accomplished by speaking with marketing officials of clubs from the current professional league in the U.S., the National Women's Soccer League (NWSL), to see how these officials engaged with these issues. Beginning play in 2013, the NWSL saw eight founder clubs with top players having salaries subsidized by international federations, while many other players saw salaries cut greatly from previous leagues. The founder clubs varied greatly, with one affiliated with a Major League Soccer (MLS) club, while others were holdovers from previous leagues. Variability between clubs in areas such as attendance, facilities, and infrastructure was massive, while the league as a whole suffered from a lack of national media coverage that has also plagued women's sports as a whole. Information on participating clubs in this study can be found in the table in Appendix F.

Data collection. Data for this research was gathered through interviews and the collection of archival material. More details can be found in Chapter 3, Page 45. For data gathering, interviewees were selected from a pool of willing participants associated with NWSL

clubs in a management and marketing capacity. Potential participants were e-mailed through publicly accessible accounts found on official team websites with information on the research study. Participants were asked questions from an interview guide cultivated through literature review and background research that focused on the marketing of their team and the league as a whole with an emphasis on marketing through feminist themes.

Data Analyses

The objective of the data analysis for this research was to identify common themes emerging from the data involving the marketing of women's soccer through feminist themes. The researcher conducted content analysis using the qualitative data analysis software ATLAS.ti 7.0 while completing a thorough review of interview transcripts and documents. The researcher focused on developing case descriptions for each case study setting in regards to their strategy and practices of marketing their product through the use of the specific feminist themes earmarked in the researcher's proposed theoretical framework.

The researcher utilized a cross-case analysis to compare and contrast emergent themes between the different cases to see how different clubs utilize similar or different strategies and practices in their marketing through the feminist themes outlined previously (Yin, 2013). As data from interviews and from archival material was collected, it was both inductively and deductively analyzed through the guidelines established by Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2013), as well as through the constant comparison protocol devised by Glaser and Strauss (1967).

The researcher began the content analysis through a process of open coding, using some of the terminology and themes gathered from the literature review to help begin the process of grouping and categorizing gathered data. Data was coded as simply and succinctly as possible

without losing meaning or context, using short, descriptive phrases as codes. Following the process of open coding, the researcher engaged in axial coding to examine relationships and trends that may have risen to the surface after open coding (Corley & Gioia, 2004; Leopkey & Parent, 2009).

An example of some of the open codes used included: ‘new/social media initiatives’, ‘fight for media recognition’, and ‘developing media relationships’, which combine towards an axial code of ‘utilizing creative methods to garner meaningful media coverage’. This evolving process of coding helped provide more nuanced analysis of the data, enabling a more precise picture of the findings and how they related to the proposed theoretical framework. For the sake of consistency, the researcher used the constant comparison techniques set out by Glaser and Strauss (1967), comparing the already gathered literature, the archival material collected, and the interview data.

Initial data analysis focused on the collected archival material, specifically, the print and electronic artifacts gathered by the researcher in relation to both the five NWSL clubs serving as case study settings, as well as the league itself. Some of the print documents examined included newspaper and magazine clippings detailing the league and its clubs and more specifically, its marketing activities, as well as any physical press releases sent out by the clubs and league, along with other artifacts such as printed team media guides that may touch on marketing. Some of the electronic artifacts examined included electronic press releases from the league and clubs, electronic news articles from third-parties, and social media activities (Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, etc.), a medium that has grown increasingly important for clubs as they try to reach a niche audience. Team and league produced audiovisual content was also examined for the

purposes of this study. In total, this study gathered two hundred eighty-nine pages of archival material.

Results

Through the analysis of the archival material and the interviews conducted with the five marketing officials, three prominent themes emerged. Specifically, the Inequity of Rules, Resources, and Coverage; the Embracing of Motherhood, Family Values, and Role Models while Shunning The “Other”; and the existence of an Ideal Heteronormative Femininity and a Consumption Community. The following section examines each of these three themes in detail.

Inequity of rules, resources, and coverage. *Budgets and resources.* While nobody can doubt the financial challenges facing the NWSL, especially considering the failure of the WUSA and WPS before it, some of the interviewed club officials did their best to distance themselves from using those challenges as a crutch or a pre-determined excuse. Brian Budzinski of FC Kansas City was one such official, claiming he would not use the club’s existence as a professional women’s team as a reason for struggling or failure. The FC Kansas City general manager noted that “business is a business,” and that the difference in using female athletes and male athletes did not necessarily place one above the other in his eyes (personal communication, July 24, 2014). Budzinski argued vehemently of having the best women players in the world as an advantage for the league and his club, even with financial roadblocks.

The paradigm has also shifted in some measure, with inequity between women’s teams and leagues and men’s teams and leagues being joined by inequity between women’s teams themselves. This has been most noticeable with the Portland and Houston teams being a smaller part of larger Major League Soccer organizations with resources far outstripping those of their non-MLS affiliated rivals. Mike Golub of the Portland Timbers, who run the Thorns in the

NWSL confirmed how his organization had a staff waiting and ready to go when the league was established late in 2012. Golub elaborates on the resources available:

And so we had an official staff, the PR staff, the sponsorship staff, the ticketing staff.

And so we plug the Thorns into that apparatus and infrastructure that we had and were able to really hit the ground running, and so obviously a lot of PR, a lot of digital, some paid advertising, but not much. But it was mainly using the relationships we have, infrastructure we have, and sales operations we have to really launch the Thorns in style (personal communication, July 30, 2014).

However, for the vast majority of the league, resources still pale in comparison to those available to professional men's teams. Marketing through the old media has often proven to be a Herculean task, with multiple representatives from organizations indicating a lack of finances to produce advertising content for newspapers and television. Wood also noted that former full-time staff positions in the early WPS days were now largely part-time endeavors, with the days of staff making more than many players being well and over. Alyse Lahue of Chicago also noted that her organization at times felt they didn't have the staffing that they thought they needed or wanted at times. It marks a far cry from the situation with many men's professional sports teams, even in soccer, which can hire a cadre of dedicated staff in different departments to fill marketing needs.

The overall decline in budgets from league-to-league has largely handcuffed clubs as they try to produce marketing content. While men's professional clubs have only dumped more money into marketing, women's clubs have largely lived off of scraps. Ryan Wood of the Boston Breakers spoke of being able to call upon advertising agencies to develop posters, billboard

mockups, and magnet and pocket schedules back in WPS but seeing the money for those efforts vanish in NWSL.

Salaries. One of the most notable areas in which the financial pinch has been felt is with player salaries. Wood of the Boston Breakers noted that it was “almost embarrassing that you have to offer fifteen thousand dollars to someone who could get probably triple that in Europe” (personal communication, July 23, 2014). Salaries were almost uniformly lower than those even at the end of WPS, except for players whose salaries were being subsidized by their respective national teams. Some American players have thus eschewed playing in NWSL in favor of European leagues, where Wood quotes one player as making “probably five times more than she would have made,” in Boston (personal communication, July 23, 2014). Lahue argued that some of this was unavoidable, as some Americans were always going to be lured by perks of European play, not limited to just salary, but also getting to play in the UEFA Women’s Champions League.

Even if teams could afford to pay players more, a stringent league salary cap and budget controls designed to promote long-term viability has also kept wages at a level below market value for European clubs in many instances. This has led to some frustration by teams, with Wood explaining that talent level overall may be limited by financial limitations. Lahue argued that the size of the current salary cap would keep some, but not all, top international players from making the move abroad to play in the NWSL.

However, this viewpoint is not shared by all in the league, with Budzinski claiming that “attracting players has never been an issue,” for his FC Kansas City club (personal communication, July 24, 2014). Budzinski also argues that there are rules and regulations in terms of player salary structure, including a salary cap, and operational realities that must be

followed no matter the league and that those should not be a hindrance in attracting players for aptly prepared organizations. Lahue agreed somewhat, albeit arguing from a different rationale, noting that the small amount of teams and great amount of talent competing for spots would always ensure quality players would be available, with those players also eager to stay in the U.S. to try and impress the management of the USWNT.

As a result of the salaries, which go as low as \$6,000 for those at the bottom of the ladder, players have had to take up part-time jobs during the season and full-time jobs after it or look for overseas playing opportunities after the end of the NWSL season in August. After the season, and even during it in some cases, players have to coach academy teams with the organization to make ends meet.

The effects on players have been stark. Wood noted that many players with his club without a spouse or not at the top of the salary scale have found themselves beholden to host families that allow the players to live with them and provide some food. Lahue spoke of the league instituting a housing cap, limiting the amount of money teams can spend on housing for players to keep the better financed squads from using that to their advantage, another measure which can put pressure on players needing places to live during the season. At the same time though, Lahue did note that housing payments on top of salaries for the very top end of the player salary scale did seem reasonable to her, though the majority of the league's players remain underpaid.

Others have been forced out of the game entirely due to financial hardships. Wood also noted a personal friend who in her mid-twenties had to, "essentially retire from the job she's always wanted, because it just doesn't pay" (personal communication, July 23, 2014). Wood's Boston side also felt the sting recently of having a top draft pick from 2014 retire after one

season to take a job with Amazon. Lahue echoed this thought noting that some of the older players face decisions as to whether it's still worth it to keep on going for "the love of the game," as she noted that "you're not making a living off of doing this" (personal communication, July 31, 2014). The Chicago Red Stars general manager was more than sympathetic to the plight of the players on the lower end of the salary scale but noted that, pragmatically, clubs had to keep salaries realistic given the revenue coming into the club, though Lahue did note a desire to get the minimum salary "much, much higher" (personal communication, July 31, 2014).

However, Lahue was much more pessimistic about salary equity with men's professional players in the short-term:

I should never say never, but we're not going to compete on a scale close to what men's professional players make. I just don't think that's a reality of the next five to ten years for us, but I would love to get to a point where players can certainly make a living off of playing for six-to-eight months and don't feel so stressed about finding a second job (personal communication, July 31, 2014).

Like Wood, Lahue freely acknowledges that some of her club's players on the lower end of the salary scale have part-time and even full-time jobs on the side just to make ends meet.

Sponsorship. Financial realities and limitations have also forced clubs to get creative with sponsorship agreements in many cases. Wood noted that Boston sealed a deal with Eagle Leasing Company that saw them give the team "a couple trailers where we could store all the players' equipment, practice jerseys, another locker that stored all the pitchside seats, field boards, any stuff we needed for game day operations," in lieu of a monetary exchange (personal communication, July 23, 2014).

Lahue spoke similarly with sponsorship deals, though she mentioned more conventional sponsors that she dubbed as musts, like hospital partners, athletic training partners, and banks. Gooley got more specific about these sponsorship arrangements, noting that finding sponsors that will help out with services to save the club money was paramount. He put a high priority on signing a healthcare sponsor, in their case Meridian Health Services, claiming that they “provide an amazing level of health care, rehab, emergency services, surgeries,” though the club cannot legally exchange medical care for advertising (personal communication, August 13, 2014). Instead, Gooley said that the club mostly receives “value-in-kind” services, where the club gets training and rehabilitation services in exchange for the advertising (personal communication, August 13, 2014).

Gooley also spoke of other beneficial sponsor arrangements, where the transaction was not purely about money. At the forefront was an agreement with AVIS Budget, where the club delivered advertising in exchange for vehicles that the club uses for players when they are in the New York/New Jersey market for the six months of the season as well as for transport to matches where flying is not an option and to and from the airport when necessary. Gooley did not put an exact dollar figure on how much this arrangement saves the club, but he did estimate that it was somewhere in the region of five figures, while that arrangement combined with the partnership with Meridian Health Services was estimated to save the club “hundreds of thousands” of dollars over multiple years (personal communication, August 13, 2014).

Venues. Other inequities have been felt by clubs through their venues. While men’s Major League Soccer clubs began life at older multipurpose stadiums, including cavernous football stadiums, the growing trend has been for clubs to play at smaller, soccer specific stadiums. On the women’s side of the game, stadiums and corresponding amenities have shrunk

with time and with the birth and death of leagues. Even as recent as the WPS days, clubs like Chicago were sharing space with their MLS cousins, often at great financial cost due to having to pay rent for the privilege of playing at the venue.

As a result of budget cutbacks, many of the NWSL clubs without affiliations with MLS teams have played in more spartan accommodations as compared to both men's professional soccer teams and previous women's professional teams in earlier leagues. These cutbacks have led to clubs having to negotiate the delicate balance between being fiscally responsible with their stadium choice while also providing a type of atmosphere that will continue to attract fans. In some cases, atmosphere has been muted due to the small size of venues. In other cases, like Boston's, a stadium that far outstrips demand can also diminish atmosphere, though Wood claimed the Breakers still had a charged atmosphere in cavernous Harvard Stadium.

Wood noted one of the major reasons Boston switched stadiums between 2013 & 2014 was a lack of parking and suitable public transportation that forced fans to arrive early or miss out. A clear emphasis was put on copious (and affordable) parking being available for Boston in their choice of going to Harvard as the club's home stadium in 2014, while proximity to public transport was also a bonus for the Breakers.

Budzinski noted that FC Kansas City also was forced to be pragmatic and prioritize what was important in terms of venue choice between the 2013 and 2014 seasons. Atmosphere was also a consideration for the club in their switch from 2013 venue Shawnee Mission District Stadium in Overland Park, Kansas to Durwood Stadium in Kansas City, Missouri for the 2014 season. Budzinski claimed that the new stadium in Kansas City provided a better atmosphere for fans, no doubt due to the lack of a running track that had kept spectators far away from the action in 2013.

Additionally, Budzinski stated that “the turf was not a high enough quality for our players,” with Durwood Stadium possessing a better brand of artificial turf, as well as a lack of distracting football lines that always irk soccer fans (personal communication, July 24, 2014). Problems with playing surface also came to the forefront in stadium discussions with Chicago’s Alyse Lahue, with the Red Stars general manager claiming that the city, despite being a soccer hotbed, did not have moderately sized venues with a good grass field around the city, or even suitable turf fields, complicating the club’s search for a permanent home, and in effect turning the organization into nomads at some stretches of their life. Jim Gooley also indicated that the quality of turf was a major factor in Sky Blue FC choosing their venue at Rutgers University. Besides being a natural grass surface with no football lines, Gooley indicated that the drainage of the field was crucial, as cancellations are severely detrimental to a club’s finances.

While Lahue argued that their current venue’s turf field is fine, the same can not be said for the presence of football (and other sport) lines on the turf, a point often brought up as an eyesore by fans and critics alike. Lahue’s club looked into painting over the lines, but the financial implications of such a move were too damaging to manage such a plan over the better part of half a year. It’s an issue that has kept the club off of TV, as the league has committed to not showing games on television where the home venue is covered with football lines, believing it to be poor for the league’s image. Lahue did admit disappointment that the league did not afford her club the opportunity to try and find a different venue for a one-off match that would allow the club and players to be featured on TV.

Lahue ruminated that there were always trade-offs in the search for a permanent home for the Chicago club. The team’s current home in Bridgeview, Illinois, for example, lacks the greater seating capacity of some of the other clubs in the league and has limited expansion possibilities.

Some of the deficiencies even affect the matchday schedule, as the distance between the field and locker rooms for players have necessitated twenty minute halftimes instead of the customary fifteen minutes. Other venues before the club's current one have been missing concessions and/or lacked parking, leading to the Red Stars having to choose the lesser of many evils in their pursuit for a suitable home.

Improvements came at a significant price for FC Kansas City. The club's first venue in Overland Park had a seating capacity of just over six thousand, with the club's average attendance of 4,626 showing the club had a solid fanbase for a first-year club in a first-year league. The second season venue in Kansas City may have brought improved field quality and the fans closer to the action, but it also only seated 3,200 patrons as well, almost half as much as the club's first venue. Additionally, Budzinski stated that the new stadium did not have surround sound and did not have a scoreboard capable of showing video replays of match action to spectators. While some of the benefits of the move may have been apparent to the management, fans were more skeptical, with the club averaging just over two thousand spectators a game, an alarming drop in attendance considering the club's first-year success.

Location also ended up being a major factor in the choice of venue for Sky Blue FC according to Gooley. He argued that the club's Rutgers University venue was close to some major highway arteries within the state, making it easy for commuters to get to. Considering some of the complaints in leagues like WPS as to how hard it was to get to some team's venues, ease of transit was clearly in the front of many clubs' minds when choosing a venue. As Wood mentioned as well, parking was another big concern, as Gooley noted that Rutgers' copious parking was another major advantage for both fans and the club.

While almost all men's professional teams can maximize the quality of such venue aspects as field quality, parking, and atmosphere, women's teams almost always have to find a harmonious balance between what best pleases the customer and what best balances the books. In 2014, FC Kansas City and Boston were able to alleviate some of the problems concerning their 2013 venues, but new problems, some unexpected, cropped up, putting management under constant pressure to evaluate and come up with pertinent solutions. Others like Sky Blue FC have struggled with anemic attendance and a lack of concession revenue despite a pristine playing surface and a solid location. Ironically, another club, Chicago, found old methods to be a partial solution, as they worked with the Chicago Fire MLS side to put on a doubleheader for one day at the club's old Toyota Park venue, an arrangement that may lead to future doubleheaders in upcoming seasons.

Nor is the mere affiliation with a Major League Soccer franchise a guarantee of being able to share the same stadium as the men's team. Portland Timbers and Thorns president Mike Golub indicated that just because the Thorns shared ownership with the Timbers, the women's side was not always guaranteed of playing in the larger Providence Park. Golub indicated that the club "didn't know whether we'd have enough demand to make sense to play in a larger venue," but instead happily moved the team into Providence Park once demand proved to be high enough before the season (personal communication, July 30, 2014). This is decidedly unlike men's professional teams, who almost always play in mostly large, amenity-laden stadiums. If demand for men's teams is not there initially, organizations try to create it instead of opting for a smaller venue. With the Thorns, the larger venue was only an option once a certain demand threshold was met.

Travel. Another inequity keenly felt by NWSL teams as opposed to their male professional counterparts is through travel to away matches, something likely taken for granted by men's teams. Needless to say, as opposed to those men's leagues, there are no charter planes, no first class seats, and no luxury hotels for players on their away days. While flights across the country to connect clubs in different regions are unavoidable, Wood noted that NWSL clubs take buses between matches whenever possible, an obviously less than ideal situation for athletes putting such a strain on their legs as part of the job. Almost as punishing are some clubs' bus trips that see departures in the morning, games in the afternoon/evening, and return trips in the dead of night, which saves on money but inflicts a brutal toll on players and staff alike. It also isn't solely a matter of 'how' but 'who' travels, with Boston just taking twenty people, in stark opposition to the small armies male professional teams take on the road.

The negotiation process between clubs' director of operations to minimize costs was portrayed by Wood as a process to find the lowest price available for hotels, ground transport, and flights, usually with a value carrier like JetBlue or SouthWest Airlines. Lahue said that Chicago uses a travel agency to secure flights and deal with travel complications, and that negotiation for rates was severely restricted as of late. At the same time though, club officials are under pressure to meet a minimum standard of quality so as not to disgruntle players. Wood claimed teams "don't wanna put the players up in a dump," (personal communication, July 23, 2014). Additionally, the Washington franchise endured a very trying experience with a charter bus company and publicly lambasted the provider through social media (Dure, 2013). Quality assurances aside, Wood noted the ability to "keep the cost to an absolute minimum," was vital, even if it meant spending an hour more on a bus to and from the stadium to a hotel as a result (personal communication, July 23, 2014).

Lahue noted a system that had been developed where clubs work out relationships with desirable local hotels, recommending them to visiting teams, though she did note it was ultimately up to the visiting team to hammer out an agreement on rates. The system allows clubs to work together to get reliable lodging for acceptable rates, always a plus for clubs that are always trying to keep travel costs to a minimum without sacrificing too much quality.

Media Coverage. Another area where the difference between men's professional sports teams and NWSL teams is keenly felt is in the depth of media coverage. Whereas men's professional sports teams, especially in the bigger cities, are explored and analyzed in exhaustive detail, professional women's soccer teams in America have always been fighting battles to get covered by the traditional media. This has been especially apparent in the biggest markets containing NWSL teams, as representatives from Boston and Chicago echoed these sentiments. The latter's Alyse Lahue expressed some disappointment at the lack of coverage and noted that the club "[doesn't] appear on the news, our scores don't appear on the ticker tape, we can't get in the Chicago Tribune to get our scores reported," reasoning that market saturation made emerging ahead of other men's professional teams in the media particularly difficult (personal communication, July 31, 2014).

Lahue also noted the extent to which the Chicago organization had to try and go to to get media attention in such a big city given their meagre resources and the heavy price of gaining mass exposure in such a city. Lahue claimed the Red Stars hired a public relations firm to try and gain this exposure, but that ultimately, results were mixed. While the firm was able to draw some television stations out to do some segments on the club, that slight uptick in mass media attention did not translate into more ticket sales, the ultimate goal according to Lahue. Lahue also spoke of the club having to purchase time on the news to get scores or other team news reported. This is in

stark contrast to men's professional teams, where media entities fall over themselves in trying to gain access for coverage.

Boston's Ryan Wood lamented the competition from the playoff contending Bruins and Celtics and the early season coverage of the Red Sox as prying potential media attendees from the Breakers throughout the season. However, Wood also noted that in comparison to the city's MLB, NBA, and NHL teams, the city's Major League Soccer team, the New England Revolution, did not get much coverage either, from either print or radio, with the latter even seeing its broadcast partner give short shrift to the local MLS club in lieu of occasional forays into World Cup talk.

Still, Wood claimed that "if for some reason the Red Sox aren't playing, Bruins and Celtics aren't playing, then you'll see like the Herald and Globe show up," hinting as to where the club fell in the city professional sports pecking order (personal communication, July 23, 2014). Wood also noted that for televised coverage, Boston was a tough sell, even when the organization would do almost all of the heavy lifting in providing content via in-house produced footage. Wood claims that said TV stations largely ignore the requests and offers unless they occur at the same time as the Women's World Cup or Summer Olympics, with the stations summing their stance up as "all the other major sports come first" (personal communication, July 23, 2014).

Wood emphasized the importance of what print coverage they did get in bridging some of the gap in attention between more notable men's professional teams and the Breakers. He noted that the general public and friends would enthusiastically mention articles in the newspaper written about the club, explaining why the club has gone to great lengths to attract the print

media. But Wood also notes responses from the public showing a complete ignorance as to the existence of professional women's soccer in Boston. He claims:

there's a whole other side of it where people are just completely clueless and aren't aware that the Breakers are even a team, who they are. Sometimes you can mention the Boston Breakers, and they think you're talking about the old Boston Breakers football team in town. And they say 'oh wow, they're back?' and it's like 'no, this is the Boston Breakers soccer team that's been around for ten years' (personal communication, July 23, 2014).

Whereas Major League Soccer has enjoyed an expanding television profile with bigger media contracts and more matches being televised, the NWSL has had to make do with partial season television deals that usually encompass just a handful of regular season matches in the second half of the season, along with the league's three playoff matches. FC Kansas City, Houston, and Portland have inked regional television deals, but production values are generally akin to that of the league's streaming efforts on YouTube. In major men's professional sports leagues, internet streaming is considered a line of last resort for games dubbed not prestigious enough to broadcast on television. In the case of the NWSL, streaming is the norm if fans want to catch all the matches apart from the handful on television.

Gooley also criticized some of the existing broadcast coverage the league and clubs did produce. He noted some of the aspects of productions of men's soccer, particularly the FIFA World Cup, and other professional sport that made them so attractive to viewers, including a multitude of cameras, replays, graphic overlays, and enhanced sound. Gooley noted that only a few NWSL matches would come close to that level, and that the league needed to work to help improve production. He went into more detail:

I think that we should be mic'ing the goals, I think that we should be mic'ing players. I think we should be showing slow motion hits, show the drama of the game and present it more like a Hollywood production than a simple ninety minute game, the camera goes back and forth with a replay of the goal. I think the game should be more entertaining, I think there should be music, I think there should be more game level camera work (personal communication, August 13, 2014).

Gooley felt that broadcast production was a great way to present the drama of the game and craft a narrative to be consumed by spectators. He claimed that discussions to this effect have gone on with the league, but that closing the gap between the reality of NWSL productions and the productions of more well-funded men's sport leagues was still an uphill climb.

Club officials were quick to point out that they were, for the most part, pleased with what coverage they did receive in the media, pointing out that overall player portrayals were largely positive. Budzinski claimed that FC Kansas City was happy with local coverage that had exceeded their own expectations. Golub was happy with the local coverage in Portland as well, claiming the city's media had fully embraced the team, while also noting that, in his eyes, national coverage had been attentive, fair, and favorable.

Some club marketing officials expressed their disappointment that Nike had not been more proactive with their efforts in assisting the NWSL with marketing, despite the sporting giant's contributions with merchandise. Ryan Wood of the Boston Breakers mooted whether Nike could plunge some of their money into billboards promoting the league in major cities, which would appear to be little trouble considering the company's vast outlays at promoting men's professional sports in a similar manner.

Embracing motherhood, family values, and role models while shunning the “other”.

A harmonious atmosphere. Much of the allure created by clubs for their product revolves around what has been billed as a ‘family friendly atmosphere’. Wood noted that a main goal of the club was to promote such an atmosphere “that extends all the way down to not just the product on the field and the gameday experience but to the players themselves” (personal communication, July 23, 2014). Wood also noted that this line of thought did not just run through management but also through coaches, who desired, somewhat paternalistically, a club where “No one gets in arguments, everyone gets along,” believing that such harmony would provide a good game day experience and product for fans (personal communication, July 23, 2014).

Alyse Lahue of the Chicago Red Stars agreed, noting that players were consulted before new players were brought in and that the club “wouldn't trade or bring anybody in without talking to them first, because they're the ones on the field” (personal communication, July 31, 2014). Lahue noted that keeping a “good dynamic” was a crucial part of building the team, with players, coaches, and management all involved in choosing players to represent the club (personal communication, July 31, 2014). Jim Gooley of Sky Blue FC echoed this sentiment as well, extending it to the club’s players’ social media activities, claiming that players are told to always be positive and to support their teammates and to support the league in general.

Brian Budzinski of FC Kansas City echoed this sentiment, claiming that “we want people that care about the club, care about the city they play for, care about the fans that they play in front of, and that are good teammates to each other on the field” (personal communication, July 24, 2014). This “family friendly atmosphere” was touted by Wood as being a big factor in pitching the club towards potential sponsors (personal communication, July 23, 2014).

Wood and Budzinski both acknowledged that portraying players as role models was a standard way of attracting the youth market, a key to the viability of teams at this point. Part of that process occurs even before the club signs players, as Wood indicated that the Breakers look far beyond actual on-field talent when they try to recruit new faces for the playing roster, with the background of a player and their overall personality being put under a microscope by team management. Boston coaches regularly contacted college coaches for potential draftees to gauge a player's demeanor, as well as to enquire about off-field incidents that may have happened in the past.

While the background investigation that Wood elucidates upon is now a frequent occurrence in any professional sports league, regardless of gender, the precedence of a player's background appears to take a heightened importance for NWSL clubs do to their youth market constituency and endless appeals towards said market. Such is obvious as Wood recounts experiences with club general manager Lee Billiard, whose background canvassing appears to be thorough to the point of almost being borderline obsessive:

I remember them asking, Lee when signing, when we were signing them 'you sure you wanna sign this player, look at her past incidents off the field'. <unintelligible> even he explained to me that there was one player the Breakers signed and he said, you know, I said, 'do you know all this happened with a player off the field,' and he said 'yep, we had a phone call with her. We talked to all her former coaches to make sure,' they ask, 'will that stuff happen again?' (personal communication, July 23, 2014).

Jim Gooley of Sky Blue FC also was insistent on deep diving into players' background before signing them. Notable was Gooley's insistence that club looks at if players are good with kids, which could be construed as a positive attribute for a club that also holds clinics and camps

for kids as part of its business model. Sky Blue FC is also interested in players' other previous work off the pitch, as well as possible career ambitions after players are done with soccer.

Gooley claims the club will help players with those aspirations after soccer, which is a nice selling point for both players and to an audience who would likely appreciate the club's altruism.

Selling the player. But Gooley notes that his club does not just look at off-field behavior when looking to recruit new players. He noted that he tries to “find out everything I possibly can about that player on and off the field,” including things like family background and anything the club could use to, in Gooley's words, “leverage her story to build the brand of Sky Blue” (personal communication, August 13, 2014). In a sense, the club is doing everything in its power to ensure they have every chance in making sure new players will resonate with the public and ultimately help the club reach its goals for its bottom line.

However, Gooley also raised an interesting point about doing research on opposition players in an effort to build narrative for matchups. In reference to players who have had off-field problems, he noted that while such situations are not “joyful”, they are still a very real part of the narrative and would be “part of our sale” (personal communication, August 13, 2014). Gooley did claim that the organization was coy with not being overt about hitting people in the face with players' problems, but that also that “all publicity is important,” even if it comes about from negative headlines (personal communication, August 13, 2014). At the same time though, Gooley did content that after negative events “the message is controlled, it's kind of conditioned and filtered properly so that it doesn't hurt the team or hurt the player,” indicating a bit of a balancing act between what sells and what could be toxic to club and league alike (personal communication, August 13, 2014).

Gooley also brought up the specter of going against the grain of what doesn't "look like" a traditional role model (personal communication, August 13, 2014). He brought up former Sky Blue FC player Natasha Kai, a Hawaiian with copious body art and tattoos who he referred to as "a little bit nutty on the field" (personal communication, August 13, 2014). Gooley detailed the decision to heavily market Kai:

Well, do you lead with that, do you advertise with that, well is that a good thing to do?

Well, her tribal tradition say that the body should be decorated in this way, and OK, that's part of a culture, OK let's put it out there. And let's put her craziness out there, we'll advertise the fact that she's a loose cannon on the field, and she's capable of absolutely anything. And what do you know, that sells tickets. It does (personal communication, August 13, 2014).

By diversifying marketing beyond the normal role model archetype, Gooley and his club may be able to appeal to a more diverse market.

Chicago has perhaps taken some of the unknown variables out of recruiting new players, as they have notably gone after many players with Midwestern ties. Lahue notes that:

We have a lot of local players, so, a lot of girls that grew up in the Illinois area that played their club soccer here and went off to college, and now we've been able to bring them back. So they have a strong connection to the community, and I think with that comes sort of an added level of really caring about the team and caring about the team's success (personal communication, July 31, 2014).

Additionally, Lahue asserts that her club has other players that have played with the team in some form for years, whether that's from past professional incarnations or the amateur youth programs the club has put together.

Role models & the community. The vetting process for Chicago goes beyond just local ties and past experience with the club, however. Lahue asserts that players have to fit the personality of the team so that they “have the utmost faith in the people that we select in making sure that they're good people, again, good role models” (personal communication, July 31, 2014). While some might argue that this typecasts players into a predefined box, Lahue proudly owns the fact that her players are looked up to as role models. She elaborates:

If you have the option between that your daughter looking up to a Red Stars player or looking up to some of these the female singers nowadays, I won't name any, but I think we provide a pretty wholesome product for them to aspire to. And going along themes of staying fit and going to college and working towards your dreams. So yeah, I think it's just comes naturally, but we certainly have no problem when we go out to youth parks and we take a player with that we want them looking up to them as a role model (personal communication, July 31, 2014).

Budzinski of FC Kansas City notes that acting as a role model is an expectation players for his club come into the organization with, claiming “every player that comes into our club knows that we're gonna be out in the community a ton” (personal communication, July 24, 2014). Part of that community involvement includes making personal appearances with sponsors, such as at a branch of a bank that may in turn hand out information at FC Kansas City matches. In essence, Budzinski is arguing that fulfilling this obligation as a role model and spokesperson for the club is every much a part of the job description as playing on the pitch is. Lahue also noted that Red Stars players were expected to “be willing to get out in the community and be willing to market the team and that are going to really fit what it means to be a Red Stars player,”

with fulfilling these obligations appearing to be a key tenet of being a Chicago player (personal communication, July 31, 2014).

Jim Gooley of Sky Blue FC went a bit further, claiming that for one of the club's major sponsors, ShopRite, the players and club were the faces of the brand. The brand in Gooley's mind is a big advocate of community service, and in exchange for getting word out about supporting the team, Sky Blue FC acts as ambassadors for ShopRite. Players go make personal appearances at stores, go visit families, go to food banks, and make other appearances representing the brand. Such a mutually beneficial arrangement helps advance the goals of both club and sponsoring company, with SaveRite getting role models to serve as shining faces for the brand.

Golub also spoke glowingly of Portland's relationship with the community at-large, praising his organization, both men's and women's teams, in "giving back" to the community, claiming "it's the right thing to do" (personal communication, July 30, 2014). While such interaction has clear altruistic purposes, Golub did not gloss over the very real business implications of being constantly engaged with the Portland community, and talked up the club's visibility in the city and constantly being in the public's eye. He noted that it gave the organization valuable opportunities to connect with supporters and potential supporters.

Of course, having 'role models' on the team front and center to help with this community engagement is a giant crux in making such outreach so credible and effective. Golub emphasized the desire for players on both the Timbers and the Thorns being "good people" (personal communication, July 30, 2014). The Timbers and Thorns president also spoke of the necessity of emphasizing the importance of making sure the "people who represent the organization on and off the field are doing the right things" (personal communication, July 30, 2014).

Gooley provided a stark example of just who embodies the role archetype on his Sky Blue FC club in the form of Nadia Nadim. Nadim is a player who overcame incredible hardship in fleeing Afghanistan and the Taliban, moving to Denmark and excelling in a game that players in her old country never played. Nadim is not just a great athlete but also a great student, ticking another box that families will find appealing. And after soccer, Nadim plans on becoming a plastic surgeon, a desirable profession in which she can enrich the lives of others. With all these desirable traits, Sky Blue FC puts Nadim on a pedestal as a player that young girls can aspire to. Gooley spoke of some of his conversations with Nadim about her role:

I say ‘this is an opportunity for girls to see you play, back, back home,’ she says, ‘yes, of course’. And I said, ‘OK, well this is our, this is whether you like this or not Nadia, you're an ambassador, you're a role model, and once you step on the field at your level, there are girls and families inspired by you’ (personal communication, August 13, 2014).

The ‘role model portrayal’ relationship is a two-way street. While much of the NWSL clubs’ business model depends on being able to portray players as role models to best attract the vital youth market, players are also dependent in some measure upon the veracity of their perception as role models. Wood notes that many players also make extra money through camps and clinics with youth players. Thus, players must conduct themselves in a manner befitting what is considered a customary ‘role model’ to retain that access to an additional market whose patronage may be necessary financially for the player to continue to be able to play for a meager playing salary. As such, many players go out of their way to interact with young fans, with Wood noting that players like Leslie Osborne, a previous Boston favorite, almost always went out of their way to talk to young fans with a smile on her face.

Playing the part of a squeaky clean role model can also pay off for players in this reciprocal relationship between them and the club. Wood was quick to admit that for Boston, such players were “the people you always see on promotional material,” thus offering up more exposure and potentially more opportunities for endorsements down the line (personal communication, July 23, 2014). Said players were mentioned as always being first in line when the club wanted to promote matches, camps, and clinics, according to Wood. Budzinski of FC Kansas City notes that players from his club also interact heavily with sponsors to try and help build the relationship between club and current or prospective sponsor. Such positive interaction from “desirable” players could also breed individual endorsement opportunities for players, as he argues that the club helps “promote them from a PR standpoint and their personal, individual brand,” in return for helping promote the club’s brand through their acts as a role model (personal communication, July 24, 2014).

Wood also emphasized the importance of new, young players at the club to uphold the historical legacy of Boston being a team of role models. He claimed that the players coming straight from college often do not realize the magnitude of their status as role models, and that he had to “sit down and have a talk with the players as a whole about their responsibilities about how to...how to act on social media and how to prepare for interviews and what not” (personal communication, July 23, 2014). Wood also noted that some players come into the professional ranks “trained” somewhat as to how to act as role models by their experience as college soccer players:

A lot of them are great. They come in already knowing, they've had so much of this stuff in college that they've dealt with this, and they know how to, how to be a role model and don't need to be reminded that if you're out at a bar and someone takes your picture, just

put the glass of wine down. Just little things like that until they pick up on...keep themselves in a positive light (personal communication, July 23, 2014).

24/7 messaging. Another aspect of successfully portraying players as role models has been accomplished by tailoring the message used in marketing of said players and the organization. A major theme used throughout the rise of women's sports, including women's soccer, in the United States has been sport as a vehicle of female empowerment that has allowed participants to break through various pernicious myths about women that had been used as excuses to keep them from participating in sport. Ryan Wood explained that the Breakers organization was one of many to benefit from previous associations with marketers who tried to highlight the athleticism of players in promotional material. Wood mentioned posters that "kind of showed like players like going into a tackle and just proving like these players are just as tough and can play, can play the sport just as aggressively as men can" (personal communication, July 23, 2014).

The natural assumption is that the women's players of NWSL clubs are designed to serve as role models for young girls, a reputation fostered by past marketing of professional women's soccer clubs and leagues. However, Wood noted that the Breakers positioned themselves as role models for young girls *and* boys. He was quick to note that the Boston youth academy fielded teams for both boys and girls, with Breakers players often coming to practices for teams of both sexes. While players may sometimes interact in these practice sessions, they are also used as a vehicle to try and attract these young boys and girls to Breakers matches. Wood believed that sometimes young boys may think that women players are not skilled or tough until actually seeing them play in person, but that actually seeing them play live changes their mind.

Fulfilling the ‘archetype’ of the role model is not just a task for off-days either, according to Wood. Budzinski of FC Kansas City claims that the club asks players to be as accessible as possible to fans. That expectation extends all the way through to the end of game nights where players on both home and visiting teams stay behind to sign autographs and take photos, even when lines extend beyond two hour’s wait. It’s not hard to figure out why the lines stretch so long, as Gooley claims that young girls “respond with shrieks” when they get autographs and pictures from their role models (personal communication, August 13, 2014). In reference to post-match autographs, Wood claims that:

people who have come to a game before, and they know they can get autographs after, and it's pretty much like a guaranteed autograph, because it's something kind of that we told the players at the beginning of the season that ‘hey, there's an autograph section after the game. We're not requiring you to do it, but it's something that the team has...kind of promotes and does every year’. Every single year, every single player goes there after the game, and the opposing players sometimes go there as well (personal communication, July 23, 2014).

While Wood’s insists that the autograph session after the match is optional, incidents where some of the league’s star players have failed to sign autographs after matches have drawn scorn from fans and media alike on social media. While much of the willingness to sign autographs may come as a result of appreciation for the fans’ support, a more cynical view may see some players fearful of deviating from the image of the gracious, humble athlete that has now become the norm for players in the league. Wood also noted that when the league and its players do receive media coverage, it has usually been positive, a fact he attributes to “the players for keeping a level head on the field and being smart off the field,” further underlining the pressure

on players to fulfill a duty as a “role model” off the field (personal communication, July 23, 2014).

Wood also explains that the construction of the role model visage does not begin and end on the soccer pitch. He notes that Boston Breakers veteran Cat Whitehill speaks annually at a women’s sports and empowerment conference and stands as a Title IX advocate for women’s participation and equality in sports, only furthering her image as someone to be looked up to by young men and women. Coincidentally, Wood notes that one of the other major speakers heavily involved in the conference is Angela Hucles, herself a former U.S. Women’s National Team player and Boston Breaker. He also claims that these outside ventures featuring present and past Breakers alike are quickly promoted by the club, tangibly as a way of boosting the credibility of the players and the club as role models and facilitator of role models respectively.

At the end of the day, Gooley did show regret that an emphasis on presenting the players as role models played such a predominant role in the marketing strategy of clubs. He claimed that:

I personally would love to be able to just put the role model thing on the shelf, yes, we're that too, but stop leading with that. I want to lead with ‘amazing professional soccer performers’, I want to lead with the matchups. We do not have that. We're not at the point (personal communication, August 13, 2014).

While Gooley felt that the league and its clubs was making progress towards that goal of being able to focus on more game-related storylines, he also was realistic in knowing that there was still a long way to go. Ideally, Gooley felt that the role model aspect should be backstory, with performance narratives taking the front seat. However, it would appear that clubs still have a long way to go to realize that ambition.

The “other”. A great deal of conflict in the past has stemmed over the lack of a voice for the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) community as far as professional women’s soccer is concerned, despite mounting evidence of a very present audience for the sport within the group. Alyse Lahue of Chicago spoke openly about the LGBT community having been a good target in terms of previous support of professional women’s soccer in the U.S. Gooley claimed appealing to the LGBT community was a “part of the whole celebration of the game” (personal communication, August 13, 2014). While the first two professional women’s soccer leagues largely ignored the LGBT community, a plurality of NWSL clubs have seemed to, at the very least, welcomed that community into the fold, with a few stridently marketing towards the community. While a few others have not overtly set up marketing arms towards the LGBT community, all clubs interviewed seemed willing at the least to be accommodating to the community.

Perhaps most open have been the Portland Thorns. Organization president Mike Golub proudly touted being the first professional sports team in the United States to endorse equal marriage rights. Golub noted that his organization was a progressive one in a very supportive city, whose environment was very conducive to such a stance on LGBT rights. Additionally, Golub mentioned the club’s openly gay players as another point of pride for the Portland organization. Based on informal evaluation and the testimony of others like Sky Blue FC’s Gooley, Portland’s crowds have often been replete with rainbow colored flags and other items commonly associated with the ‘pride’ movement as well.

Lahue indicated that Chicago had become very involved in catering to the LGBT community in recent seasons, holding a formal pride night in 2014 in June, the typical month for pride month around the United States according to the Red Stars general manager. The Red Stars

organization reached out to all of the Chicago area's LGBT organizations, as well as the LGBT Chamber of Commerce in helping put together the event at a match in 2014 that went well according to Lahue, to the point that the club wants to continue it as a yearly tradition.

The pride night was also listed as the catalyst to forging relationships with LGBT groups that Chicago hopes will bear future fruit for the organization. One such link was being able to partner as a co-sponsor with a suicide prevention organization for their 'Walk Gives Me Hope' event that was organized in part by the Chicago LGBT Chamber of Commerce that sought to prevent suicides amongst the young LGBT population. Such participation allows organizations like Chicago to show their commitment in being a totally inclusive environment and speaking to a demographic that clubs in previous leagues have largely ignored.

FC Kansas City general manager Brian Budzinski indicated that his club's official supporters group, the Blue Crew, had a sizable LGBT population within its ranks. Budzinski claims that the club works "to make that group bigger and stronger, whether it's promotions, things for the club, ticketing, merchandise, gear, access to players, etc." (personal communication, July 24, 2014). Chicago's Alyse Lahue echoed some of these thoughts, noting that the LGBT population, in her mind, has typically supported sports, making them an ideal marketing target for clubs and the league as a whole.

Gooley spoke of some of the problems Sky Blue FC faces in marketing to the LGBT community based on its location. While Gooley claimed there was a LGBT presence in the New Jersey area where the club is based, it also was not a highly marketable place for the community in his eyes. Gooley elaborated on how much easier it would be to attract the LGBT community if the club was closer to New York City:

I could go into New York City and put together packages and bring out a larger contingent to come to these games, but I wouldn't do that normally for any club, only because of the geography and the reach, it's just beyond, it's a little beyond reasonable to come to New York City to come to our games. If we were playing in New York City, no problem, no problem. I just walk up and down Christopher Street and with a megaphone, 'come on out and celebrate yourself, come celebrate with us now' (personal communication, August 13, 2014).

Given the perceived importance of drawing the LGBT community, it will be interesting to see if Sky Blue FC and other clubs can find a happy medium in attracting that audience, even with geographical roadblocks.

At the same time though, while Wood of the Boston Breakers acknowledged that the presence of lesbian players in the league was hardly a shock to anyone, he also noted some reticence within his club in fully advocating towards the LGBT community. While Wood did not overtly refer to potential homophobia within the club's fanbase, he did note that "a lot of the parents that come to the games have that old school mentality where we feel we have to be kind of cautious about the way we approach things and the way we promote things," a rather blatant coding of some fans being uncomfortable with what they may see as a "different" lifestyle (personal communication, July 23, 2014).

Such an example of wary caution was evident in a marketing example provided by Wood relating to the promotion of couple Lianne Sanderson and Joanna Lohman, who both played for Boston in the 2013 and 2014 NWSL seasons. Specifically, the pair appeared in *People* magazine, with an article detailing their engagement and life as a couple. Wood describes speaking with league officials about promotion of the article:

So I think we had a talk with the league and was like, 'as much as it is to say 'hey', go tweet something, go pick up the latest People magazine to see Jo and Lianne,' it was like 'People is big enough, it'll promote itself, and we don't have to' (personal communication, July 23, 2014).

Wood expressed frustration with some of these edicts from “up high”, noting that he doesn’t think players want to be pigeonholed into certain typecast roles, but that being in *People* magazine is nonetheless a huge honor (personal communication, July 23, 2014). But Wood also noted that among the market for the league’s product are “adults who feel like their kids are going to be wrongly influenced by knowing all this,” in reference to the LGBT community (personal communication, July 23, 2014). Despite what some would label a regressive viewpoint, Wood did note his optimism in hoping that things would change and that overt promotion of LGBT content like the *People* magazine article featuring Sanderson and Lohman would become more accepted by all with the passage of time.

Ideal heteronormative femininity and a consumption community. *The consumption community.* Many of the accompanying activities around a game day are built around fostering a consumption community amongst one of the major markets targeted by teams and the league: young girl and boy soccer players. Giveaways are frequent occurrences, with sponsors quick to give out items that seem most likely to be enjoyed by children like miniature soccer balls. When products are not being offered and touted, the clubs are all too eager to offer services targeted towards the youth market. There are numerous ‘skills’ challenges that allow youngsters to shoot into goals in pavilions, while Wood also noted Boston offered up birthday parties featuring player visits. Such fan service is likely used to not only bring in extra revenue but also build brand loyalty and, ideally, repeat business from youth players and their families.

In large part, merchandise being sold is often targeted to what Alyse Lahue of Chicago had previously dubbed “low-hanging fruit”, the youth players and clubs that the Red Stars have traditionally targeted (personal communication, July 31, 2014). Besides the youth merchandise that Lahue points to as big sellers, Chicago also does great business with merchandise targeted towards women according to the Red Stars general manager.

In the long-term, Lahue spoke of trying to expand the brand and the merchandising of that brand out into the city of Chicago at-large instead of just confining it to the stadium and online. In particular, Lahue discussed the club’s jersey and the iconography it represents with the Chicago flag featuring prominently on the club’s shirt. Lahue mentioned the shirt with great pride and building demand and a further consumption community within the public to get that shirt, AKA a piece of the club, AKA a piece of the city. Some of the goals mentioned included getting that shirt into the O’Hare Airport and big department shops on Michigan Avenue, such as the Nike store.

Aiming for the women’s market. The symbiotic relationship between teams and apparel sponsors can best be seen within the partnership between one of the NWSL’s leading corporate supporters, Nike, and the teams of the league. While the most commonly talked about aspect of the relationship has been Nike’s support with merchandise, FC Kansas City general manager Brian Budzinski spoke of an even deeper relationship. He recounts that “Nike's came out and done some testing on the players themselves so they can, here in Kansas City, so they can improve their gear for the women's game” (personal communication, July 24, 2014). In effect, clubs like FC Kansas City are getting not just the highly coveted Nike gear for their players to use and to sell to fans but also the credibility that comes with being associated with such a well-known and respected brand. For Nike, they get to associate themselves with some of the best

known players in the world in women's soccer and are able to develop and refine products and merchandise that will enable to let the capture the constantly growing women's market.

Gooley asserted the importance of a copious merchandising game based on thoughts about some of the club's female target market. He crowed:

If you think about our fanbase, and how they behave at games, women have this joy for shopping, that even just browsing. I don't know what it is, I don't have it, but I recognize it. When we open up our gates, our fans flock to the merchandise tent, and the merchandise tent is busy all game. And we make money there. It's great, I would love it if we could have that tent open all year long (personal communication, August 13, 2014).

Gooley went on to ruminate about some of the more "feminized" products the club was looking to offer besides soccer apparel, such as jewellery and shoes, in essence trying to capitalize on objects made desirable by messengers of heteronormative femininity (personal communication, August 13, 2014).

Additionally, Gooley was quick to tout the growing market of "feminine" clothes that Sky Blue FC has been adding to their product line (personal communication, August 13, 2014). Gooley claimed that "girls like to wear feminine clothes," and that Nike's offerings had largely come up short in this regard other than women's cut replica jerseys (personal communication, August 13, 2014). He detailed his urging the club's upper management to capitalize on this perceived gap in the merchandise market, bringing in products like "special running tops that are very feminine," that Gooley claimed sold very well (personal communication, August 13, 2014). Gooley spoke of expanding the club's "feminine look" in terms of merchandise as a way to increase a revenue stream that had previously been lagging (personal communication, August 13, 2014). In large part, Gooley and his club are selling a product line that allows young girls and

women to ‘do’ femininity in heteronormative terms while still promoting athleticism and sport, something Nike has been in tune with for decades.

Who is put front and centre when pushing products to that market has been a constant source of debate and conflict through the years and through incarnations of professional women’s soccer in the United States, with a push and pull between promoting the most heteronormatively ‘feminine’ players and the most athletic players, regardless of whether they meet the pristine definition of heteronormative femininity. Lahue spoke of this battle but refused to separate the two categories into a stark dichotomy, noting that her Chicago club “[doesn’t] think that we differentiate between the two very often” (personal communication, July 31, 2014). Lahue claims that the club rotates who it uses for marketing depending on who it markets to and what is marketed but that also, it’s not a matter of choosing a player who sits solely at one end of the spectrum and not another. It’s instead a choice between three-dimensional female athletes that “all bring something very different to the table,” that the club can use in a variety of marketing activities (Lahue, personal communication, July 31, 2014).

Provocative pictorials. Whereas the notion of professional women’s soccer players posing nude or in revealing attire has been a divisive issue in the past, most of the marketing officials interviewed approached the issue magnanimously. Previously, mixed messages have been sent by leagues, such as when WUSA used promotional material featuring players in alluring poses while also not strenuously objecting to a Playboy offer to star player Heather Mitts to pose nude. However, critics were vehemently against such activities, claiming, in essence, that they cheapened the sport.

Ryan Wood of the Boston Breakers was conflicted on whether posing in revealing attire or tastefully nude in ventures such as ESPN The Magazine’s Body Issue benefits teams or the

league at all. Wood noted that such opportunities were big boons for the players in terms of exposure in a sport where such opportunities do not arise every day. Brian Budzinski of FC Kansas City also projected an air of neutrality towards such magazine spreads. He explained that:

each player they have the ability to market and promote themselves that'll better, better themselves financially, that's, that's for them to make their choices on what type of marketing they do about themselves. Whether that's a product they align themselves with or a modeling type of situation (personal communication, July 24, 2014).

However, Budzinski also claimed the club didn't have an opinion either way with such ventures, ultimately shifting responsibility to players for decisions on these offers and the promotion of said offers. Equally, Lahue personally had no problems with players posing in such magazines. In the same vein, Mike Golub of the Portland Thorns spoke of the decision to participate in such photo spreads as completely being up to the players. Gooley of Sky Blue FC echoed the thoughts of many players who had posed for such pictorials in the past, claiming that these athletes had worked hard to get in the physical shape they're in and that their bodies were "showpieces" (personal communication, August 13, 2014).

There were dissenting opinions on embracing specific brands of magazine that published the photo spreads in question. Golub of the Portland Thorns was most approving of Sports Illustrated, claiming the magazine "handles athletes with a great deal of dignity," and that the attention was good for both the posing athletes, as well as the league (personal communication, July 30, 2014). On the other hand, Gooley spoke of Sports Illustrated as being "a little more gratuitous" than comparable spreads in ESPN The Magazine (personal communication, August 13, 2014).

In contrast, Lahue sung the praises of ESPN The Magazine's Body Issue, claiming that it was not just showing off the bodies of female soccer players but of all types of athletes, both male and female. Gooley also was more approving of ESPN The Magazine, elaborating why he favoured it over Sports Illustrated:

ESPN is more of an athletic art form. The photography is...and the themes of these poses and pictures is obviously far and away beyond just here is a body being painted. Sports Illustrated is tongue-in-cheek if you ask me. Here's a girl wearing nothing but pink. Them being coyish and posing in a sexy way in a pink bathing suit, that to me is just sells Sports Illustrated magazines (personal communication, August 13, 2014).

Gooley added that in ESPN The Magazine's portrayals, he felt that athletes were presented with more artistry than in Sports Illustrated, which he called more "cheesy" than liberating (personal communication, August 13, 2014).

Lahue also presented a spirited defence of the adage of "any publicity is good publicity," claiming such pictorials were "just going to open us up to a whole different realm of possibilities in terms of new fans or people that may get interested in the game" (personal communication, July 31, 2014). The Chicago Red Stars general manager made it clear that she had no qualms about where new fans came from, even if they just happened to arrive after viewing players in a magazine pictorial. Lahue believed that pictorials in magazines like Sports Illustrated and ESPN The Magazine could unlock new markets for teams and the league, and that they did not want to be pigeonholed into appealing to just one demographic, such as being tethered solely to the youth market.

However, just how much the league is willing to associate itself with such efforts was brought into question by an anecdote of Wood relating towards the league's attitude towards

promotion of then Boston player Sydney Leroux's appearance in the ESPN The Magazine Body Issue. Wood recounts a conversation he had with NWSL league official Patrick Donnelly:

I had a long talk with Patrick Donnelly from the league office about promoting it. It's the first year of NWSL, new league, you get your biggest star in the body issue which is one of the most, next to the swimsuit issue, in terms of sport magazines, like special editions, it's, I mean people look forward to it every year. So it was 'hey, let's, should we promote this and say 'look, one of the Boston Breakers is in ESPN the body?'. And from our, our angle, we said want just to, just to let fans know that it's available, that's she's in it or what not. The league was like, 'No, absolutely not. We don't want to promote anything like this' (personal communication, July 23, 2014).

Wood claims that Donnelly's reasoning was that the product would sell and promote itself and that the Breakers were told explicitly to not promote Leroux's appearance in the body issue, as the league and the club catered to a "younger audience" (personal communication, July 23, 2014).

Wood also notes that "If it was like a CNN, or like, I mean a Time Magazine piece, we'd be all over it, like 'oh hey, look who's in the major magazine,'" indicating that the league only has interest in actively promoting publicity that does not have the potential to offend, in their eyes, a lucrative youth and family market (personal communication, July 23, 2014). On its face, the league and its clubs would appear to be glad for the attention from the 'heterosexual male gaze' that such photo spreads can bring, as long as it can plausibly distance itself from any potential critical or media backlash over such photos that have lingered over past leagues. As a matter of consistency, Wood notes that he does not recall either Portland or Seattle overtly

promoting the appearances of Alex Morgan and Megan Rapinoe in the Sports Illustrated swimsuit issue and the ESPN The Magazine body issue respectively either.

Lahue of Chicago also was wary about focusing too heavily on sex appeal when promoting the club's players to the public. She notes that the club "[wants] to focus more on the women as athletes, not necessarily showcasing their sex appeal too highly," though she also notes that any notion of "girl power" as a theme has been overdone a bit in the past (personal communication, July 31, 2014). Still, though Lahue admits sex appeal is still "a part of the game", she also stressed that the Red Stars "focus on the fact that these are elite athletes and they're really strong women," and called such a truth "beautiful" (personal communication, July 31, 2014). Gooley echoed some of these sentiments and claimed that anyone who did not approve could simply not buy the magazine, and that it was simply a choice.

Discussion/Conclusion

This research examined the marketing of the National Women's Soccer League and its clubs through feminist themes. Despite the popularity of the USWNT and of soccer as a participation sport in the United States, research into the marketing of the sport has been sparse and largely anecdotal (Christopherson et al., 2002; Dure, 2013; Grainey, 2012; Longman, 2001). Feminist enquiry into women's soccer (e.g. Caudwell, 1999; Christopherson et al., 2002; Elling, 1999; Knoppers & Anthonissen, 2003; Scraton et al., 1999) has largely focused on the game outside of the U.S. despite repeated attempts at making a professional league work in the United States. These case study interviews have revealed that the use of feminist themes in the marketing of professional women's soccer is very much alive, while many of the challenges in equality brought to light by feminist sport marketing literature are still being contended with to this day.

Given the glaring failures of the first two professional women's soccer leagues in the United States due in large part to haphazard and ineffectual marketing, a coherent marketing plan is crucial to the viability of the NWSL. This study of marketing through feminist themes in the NWSL expands the sport management literature by explaining: the effects of an inequity of rules, resources, and coverage on marketing strategies for NWSL clubs; the embracing of motherhood, family values, and role models while shunning the "other" and how that has changed recently with NWSL clubs; and the use of ideal heteronormative femininity to construct a consumption community and its effect on the marketing of NWSL clubs.

In the past, the patriarchy controlling soccer sought to control the game as played by women, using outdated myths to implement humiliating rules differences as compared to the men's game involving the timing of the game and the equipment used (Lisi, 2013; Longman, 2001). While the embarrassing alterations in rules due to perceived physical deficiencies in women are a thing of the past, a lack of equality in funding and media coverage in comparison to men's sport that has plagued women's sport and women's soccer in particular was still found to be rampant (Blinde et al., 1991; Duncan & Messner, 1996; Messner, 2002).

Within the NWSL, the internet has seemed to serve as a great equaliser in terms of coverage, with the profligation of niche sites devoted to women's soccer offering a depth and breadth of coverage that the two previous leagues could only dream about. The "highly stereotypical feminized" type of coverage seen in past tournaments has also dissipated to some extent, with more of the media regarding women's soccer as a 'serious' sport (Kane & Greendorfer, 1994, p. 36). However, in other areas, the NWSL has lagged behind even other women's leagues like the WNBA. Rather than progressing, the television prospects of pro women's soccer in the U.S. have regressed with time, with the amount of games being televised

dropping, with the profile of networks televising matches fading as well. The lack of a consistent television deal has hampered opportunities for growth according to those interviewed in this study, while battling to gain local media attention has been a struggle for some. Given the importance of the media in influencing public perception, winning that struggle has to be key for the NWSL (Fortunato, 2000). For others though, devoted beat reporters have emerged, while the league's streaming every match via YouTube has allowed clubs to still reach audiences beyond those who attend live.

Inequality now is not confined to just women's sport leagues like the NWSL and men's sport leagues but within the women's sport leagues themselves. Clubs like the Portland Thorns and the Houston Dash have Major League Soccer teams as parent organisations, giving them advantages in infrastructure, facilities, and finances that other clubs simply cannot match. Even with this in mind however, league-wide, there is the brutal reality of salaries for non-subsidised players being low enough that some need part-time employment during the season, and most need another source of income after it. In this respect, a continual decline in salaries as leagues have come and gone may have been necessary for viability, but it has also placed an enormous burden on players. The salary battles of the past faced by the USWNT have been magnified for the rank and file of the NWSL, with little in the way of concrete solutions in sight (Longman, 2001).

It is clear from this research that the ability of clubs to portray their players as role models to help attract families and younger spectators remains a key crux of marketing strategy for each team. Despite criticism of a reliance on such a market in past leagues (Knoppers & Anthonissen, 2004; Longman, 2003; Martinez, 2008), nearly all who were interviewed noted the necessity of grabbing that market but also being well aware of needing to capture a more adult

market to truly thrive at the gate. Such a narrow focus may have worked for past short-term tournaments but simply are not viable in the long-term (Christopherson et al., 2002; Longman, 2001). In this respect, clubs with MLS ties such as Portland have benefitted from a carryover audience from their men's team who may also attend women's games under the same organisation.

Attitudes towards those not fitting in the typical heterosexual, heteronormative feminine template have softened notably. Homophobia has plagued women's sport, and women's soccer in particular, for decades (Griffin, 2002; Kane & Lenskyj, 1996; Longman, 2001). While homophobia was less overt surrounding the USWNT and the early pro women's soccer leagues, much of the early marketing and media coverage of these ventures still shied away from any implications of homosexuality, instead touting aspects such as 'motherhood' and being proper role models (Christopherson et al., 2002; Lipsyte, 1999). Though the degree to which clubs appeal to the LGBT community varied greatly amongst interviewed NWSL marketing officials, all seemed at least tolerant of the community, while some had even made marketing towards the LGBT community a key plank in their marketing efforts. Additionally, as society has changed, so has the attitude towards the sexuality of players. Sexuality is no longer taboo in most circles, with many players openly gay.

Attitudes towards overt off-the-pitch displays of ideal heteronormative femininity have also shifted. Previous picture spreads in magazines of scantily clad players have been met with hyperbolically negative responses from some in power (Longman, 2001; Markovits & Hellerman, 2004). However, now, such pictorials are now often met with a laissez-faire attitude from team officials, seemingly happy that players are able to draw attention to them in an increasingly saturated media environment. However, team marketing officials also noted that the

league still wanted no part in actually actively promoting such magazine spreads, indicating attitudes haven't fully changed.

While NWSL clubs' merchandising efforts have been stymied by supply issues at some turns, league partner Nike has boosted options significantly in 2014. Beyond basic options from Nike for every team, some clubs have actively sought to make more 'feminine' products available for consumption, with initial efforts proving to be successful sellers. Akin to many other efforts to target product sales towards women, such merchandising efforts allow purchasers to 'do' heteronormative femininity at their leisure, all while building the brand of the NWSL clubs, creating a viable consumption community. For decades, corporations have sought to angle their way into a lucrative market by selling products appealing to women's desires to be able to 'perform' femininity (Bartky, 1998; Goldman, 1992; Wolf, 1991). With companies having previously used female athletes to help sell products towards women, the NWSL and its clubs appear to be continuing a long tradition of a mutually beneficial relationship between corporate America and women's sport that allows companies to reach a lucrative market while boosting club and league coffers (Cuneen & Spencer, 2003; Lumpkin, 2007; McGinnis et al., 2003).

Managerial Implications

Marketing is the lifeblood of sport clubs and leagues, and nowhere is it more important than in an embryonic league littered with past examples of failure. The past experiences and present initiatives in marketing through feminist themes can go a long way towards putting women's sport clubs and leagues, and in particular, women's soccer clubs and leagues on a road towards success.

While a lack of funding equal to that of men's teams and men's leagues is unquestionably unfair, it is reality for the teams of the NWSL and the league as a whole. Many of the

interviewed marketing managers accepted it as such and noted that business was business and that everyone who pitched in for a team knew what they were getting into. While gaining an association with a Major League Soccer team has obviously helped Portland out to an enormous degree, other clubs have worked stridently to find creative solutions to pressing problems. One problem that has not been solved however is that of player pay, which is frighteningly low for most players and an issue that will have to be addressed sooner rather than later if the NWSL is not to become a transient league with the majority of players drifting away after just a few seasons.

The full embrace of new media and social media has also proven to be a critical development in the marketing of women's soccer, giving a chance for smaller leagues like the NWSL to close the coverage gap on bigger leagues. Teams have used social media to keep fans informed as well as push their product, practices that must continue considering the sparse coverage from traditional media. However, considering the positive opinions of those who did attract traditional media to cover games, a concerted effort at a well-rounded media strategy encompassing both new and traditional media should be in every NWSL club's plan.

The onus on an all-encompassing strategy to bring in more than one market was also notable. While it was clear that a focus on continuing to bring in youth and families is necessary as they are the most likely spectators to attend, all interviewees seemed to acknowledge that appealing to an older audience was a must if their clubs and the league were to gain long-term traction. Again, this is an area in which MLS affiliated clubs have an advantage, in the form of an existing base of just that market as already being engaged with the organisation.

A renewed commitment towards marketing to the LGBT community has also paid dividends for those clubs who have fully embraced such initiatives. With the turn in public

sentiment towards the LGBT community, the rewards of actively marketing and appealing to that community seem to far outweigh any negative consequences from a dwindling minority of offended parties. The positive results of early marketing initiatives would only seem to indicate that more of such initiatives are on the way from prudent organisations.

The cognitive dissonance between clubs and the league on pictorials of players in swimsuits or revealing attire likely needs to be resolved sooner rather than later. As it stands, the league looks to be benefitting from the attention gained by such pictorial spreads while also telling teams to keep quiet about the spreads to prevent any potential blowback. Such a stance would make it seem that the league's officials desire being able to profit off the attention of the heterosexual male gaze while also protecting the sanctity of their status as a purveyor of 'wholesome' family entertainment. It is a messy contradiction and one which the league must likely address at some point.

The continued growth of a 'consumption community' also bears watching as, for the first time, a professional women's soccer league has major backing from one of the world's top apparel manufacturers in Nike. While Nike has been overt in their appeals to capture the female market by marketing products enabling women to 'do' heteronormative femininity, this study also shows evidence NWSL clubs are getting into the game. While it is clear that clubs are actively targeting merchandise to youth markets, how they try and capture the adult female market bears watching.

Future Directions

Studying the marketing of professional women's soccer through an analysis of marketing through feminist themes has provided valuable insight into the marketing of women's soccer in the United States, a subject which has been vastly underinvestigated, despite the existence of

three professional leagues and a lucrative national team. This research serves as a mere starting point, with further research into the marketing of women's soccer through feminism necessary as the game continues to grow at accelerated rates. There are still gaps in the literature, as well as voices that need to be heard in piecing together a narrative.

One of the voices that has been so often unheard from in previous research into women's soccer marketing is the players themselves. Much of the time, the experience and thoughts of players are reduced to carefully filtered soundbites that reveal little other than an adherence to the company line. A systematic campaign of research with a set of players could help reveal more insight into some of the issues raised by this research paper. Specifically, an inquest into the challenges facing less well-known players seems prudent given some of the financial realities about players that were revealed by marketing officials for this study. Additionally, issues on players' agency over their own body and how they may use it to market themselves to the public and for personal endorsements could be investigated. Finally, a players perspective as to their perception as role models to the public at-large could be examined given the importance the interviewed marketing officials put on such a role.

Another voice that needs to be heard is that of the fans. While sport marketing research involving fans has been a constant in sport management literature, there are still notable gaps within said literature for the sport of women's soccer. Use of this study as a guide to examine issues brought up by this research could help fuel examinations into fan perceptions of the marketing efforts of the NWSL and its clubs. Studies could gauge the familiarity of fans about the league to judge whether improvements need to be made in terms of reaching an audience through the media. Other studies could target the LGBT community and see if outreach efforts

are proving effective. Finally, in-depth studies could be used to see if merchandising efforts are proving to be successful or whether clubs need to diversify and change their plans.

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CHAPTER 6

ARTICLE #3 – THE IMPACT OF

FEMINIST THEMES ON MARKETING SECTORS OF NWSL CLUBS

Unlocking the secret to effectively market and sell professional women's soccer in the United States has been a fruitless task for proprietors of two leagues that have come and gone over the course of the last decade and a half. The Women's United Soccer Association (WUSA) poured through its copious amount of startup funding from powerful investors and failed to resonate with a public that had only years earlier made the United States women's national team (USWNT) wildly popular (Grainey, 2012). Later, Women's Professional Soccer (WPS) suffered through haphazard marketing strategies and internal squabbles that pushed the league into insolvency after just three seasons (Dure, 2013). A third league, the National Women's Soccer League (NWSL), began play in 2013 with hopes to avoid such pitfalls, even with the odds stacked against it.

Frustratingly for operators of professional women's soccer leagues, the USWNT has been a powerhouse both on and off the pitch for the past decade and a half. After a languid start to their first decade and a half, the USWNT turned into a sensation with the 1999 Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) Women's World Cup that broke records for live attendance and television ratings for women's soccer in the United States (Longman, 2001). Though the decade after the success of 1999 was trying as the stars of that team retired, recent years have brought more exposure and more momentum once more. Television records again fell

for the USWNT's 2011 Women's World Cup campaign, while the team's dramatic matches also proved to be a social media hit (Lisi, 2013).

Despite the relevance of soccer to women's sport, research into the marketing of women's soccer has been scant for the USWNT and nearly non-existent through three different professional leagues. What research that has been done has mostly been piecemeal from books, newspaper and magazine articles, and an increasing number of blog reports as women's soccer's popularity has boomed on social media. In the case of a study done into the USWNT's success by Christopherson, Janning, and McConnell (2002), attention was paid to thematic analysis of media coverage of the 1999 FIFA Women's World Cup with little attention being paid to the actual marketing of the event. Systematic research into the 1999 FIFA Women's World Cup beyond that proved lacking, a surprising gap considering the event's importance to the sport and to women's sport as a whole.

Even more glaring has been the lack of enquiry into the marketing practices of either the WUSA or WPS during the three-year run of each or after each's dissolution. The most prominent study into the marketing of either league was by Jowdy and McDonald (2003), who looked at a year-end fan event early in the lifespan of WUSA and some of the effects the organization of the event had on sponsors. However, a more expansive study on the marketing of the league never happened, and studies into the marketing of WPS, a league which differed in some drastic ways from its predecessor have been absent.

Previous research into women's soccer worldwide has touched on the intersection of feminist themes and the marketing of the sport, though much of that view has been focused on such developments outside of North America. Some of the themes discovered and examined include a continuing and pervasive inequity in resources and coverage between men's and

women's soccer, the use of sexualization and an ideal of heteronormative femininity to sell women's soccer, and the stigmatization of those who participate but do not fit that heteronormative mold (Caudwell, 1999; Cox & Thompson, 2004; Knoppers & Anthonissen, 2004; Williams, 2004). However, research into feminism and women's soccer has not kept pace with the rapid growth of the sport, no doubt fostered by the proliferation of the availability of news and discussion of the sport on the internet.

This dearth of research into the marketing of women's soccer has been reflected by the lack of real enquiry into either the last league to operate, WPS, or the current league, the NWSL. Though there have been numerous retrospective looks into some of the perceived reasons behind the fall of WUSA and WPS, they have been almost exclusively anecdotal and overtly simplistic with their reasoning (Grainey, 2012; Dure, 2013). While the NWSL has drawn some mild interest from some quarters of the media, enquiry has generally focused on the end product of marketing and sales instead of the rationale and perspective behind marketing decisions (Dure, 2013).

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to examine and explain the effect that feminist themes have had on the general marketing practices of NWSL clubs using case settings of five of the league's clubs. Additionally, this study aims to compare and contrast these effects with those on prior leagues to help track and explain the growth and evolution of marketing within professional women's soccer in the United States.

This study briefly examines some of the ways that feminist themes have affected marketing in women's soccer before the NWSL, as well as how those themes have made an impact in the marketing of the NWSL and its clubs. A case study with five settings was used to compare and contrast the effects that the use of feminist themes have had on the general

marketing practices of NWSL clubs and the league itself. This research adds to the sport management literature by examining how the use of feminist themes in marketing have impacted the general marketing practices of NWSL clubs, an area that has gone unexamined to this day.

This chapter briefly examines feminist theory, gender theory, and gender barriers and their association to sport. Following that, a glimpse into how feminist themes have affected marketing of women's soccer in the past both through the USWNT and in the WUSA and WPS is provided. This is followed by details of the findings of the study on the effect on the general marketing practices of NWSL clubs through the use of feminist themes in marketing, as well as a discussion as to how findings from this study relate to findings from past studies. Finally, concluding thoughts, managerial implications, and future directions for research are provided.

Feminism in Sport

The definition of what feminism entails exactly has been one that has changed and shifted along with constant debate over a century. However, the growth of feminism worldwide in recent times has largely been built through this debate about what it means and to whom, with the concept often meaning something different entirely to two different people who declare themselves feminists (McRobbie, 2009). As such, 'feminism' has been hard to define with a catch-all definition, but Birrell (2000) argues that this constant argument over what feminism is has helped strengthen it as a theory to be used in discourse and research. Feminism has most often been separated into three waves, each encompassing a different set of priorities to go with the realities of the time period.

First-wave feminism largely rallied for the cause of women's suffrage, emerging during the industrial revolution along with a degree of more liberalized politics (Heywood, 1997; Madsen, 2000). The 1970s and 1980s saw the rise of second-wave feminism under the belief that

sex and gender were distinct constructs (Butler, 1993). Second-wave feminism was not without its critics, however. Many criticised second-wave feminism for homogenising the experience of all women into a singular template, while ignoring important factors such as race, sexuality, and class that had very real effects in shaping the experiences of women worldwide (Evans, 1995).

Dissatisfaction with second-wave feminism gave birth to third-wave feminism in the 1990s, with Judith Butler, among others, seeking to address the differences between women highlighted above in the fight for equality. Many third-wave feminists were increasingly disenchanted with a belief that moves towards equality were disproportionately going to white, middle-class women while minority groups still felt the sting of inequality (Caudwell, 2011). Third-wave feminism notes that oppression does not just come from men and affect women but that racism, homophobia, and income inequality cut across gender lines and condemns men and women to struggles against oppression.

The sport industry has often been described as one that falls upon strict binary gender lines, promoting an intractable sense of male superiority in the eyes of feminists (Shaw, 2006). Feminists' goal of gender equity has been stridently opposed by male hegemonic forces for decades, with those men in power reluctant to release the reigns of power. Sport has functioned as one of the battlegrounds in which the battle for equity has been most fiercely fought. Messner (2002) claims that a "gender regime of sport," enforces male hegemonic dominance, promoted by powerful figures within the sport industry (p. 65). Resistance to true gender equity within sport has been fervently resisted by powerful and unbending sport institutions that reinforce their power with distinct differences in rules, funding, and opportunity for men and women.

Strides towards equality have been made by feminists within the sport industry though, specifically within women's soccer. Through North America and Europe, legislation, such as the

United States' Title IX, has helped speed the march towards equality by offering up opportunities to girls and young women where none previously existed (Caudwell, 2011). Additionally, a rise of those conscious of third-wave feminism have proceeded with initiatives to help curb and eliminate racism and homophobia, two blights upon both the men's and women's game.

Gender Theory

Gender is a critical construct within feminism and feminist studies (Caudwell, 2011). Caudwell notes that to most, gender "denotes biological differences between women and men" (p. 331-332). However, Judith Butler (1990) has previously argued that gender is not a biological construct but socially inscribed on us through acts of performing gender, in effect 'doing' masculinity and femininity. Butler (1993) also says that "the regulatory norms of 'sex' work in a performative fashion to constitute the materiality of bodies," through "reiterative and citational practice" (p. 2). In effect, we construct our gender identities through imitation and repetition of what norms are defined to us as 'right'.

In that vein, Roth and Basow (2004) note that "sexed bodies are constructed through the activities we do continually, often without conscious thought" (p. 246). Through the performance of and through the reaction to these activities, differences in masculinity and femininity are emphasized. The construction and perpetuation of masculinity is approved and promoted by the hegemony, while the construction and perpetuation of femininity has engineered those traits to be viewed as inferior to those defining masculinity. This binary relationship is put into practice by aspects of society such as the media, politics, and entertainment on a constant basis.

Butler (1993) noted that traditional heteronormative constructions of femininity have perpetuated inequality while denoting the bodies of non-conformers as illegitimate. Feminists

also argue that ideals of heteronormative femininity have been erected by the powerful forces of hegemonic masculinity, with men in positions of power using popular culture such as movies, television, and the internet to construct a template of what a ‘desirable’ woman looks like: young, thin, white, heterosexual, and voluptuous (Gill, 2007). This ideal is then transmitted to the population at large to sell products to women pressured to conform and to ‘do’ heteronormative femininity with the aid of products and services that help them abide by a pervasive standard towards a pathway to success, in the process, creating a consumption community (Goldman, 1992).

Sport has often served as an arena to highlight a superiority/inferiority male/female dichotomy (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Bryson (1987) posits that the masculine hegemony controlling much of sport has “negative evaluations of women’s capacities” rooted throughout it (p.350). Messner (1992) claims that sport has typically been a male preserve, allowing males to form bonds with each other, friend-to-friend, father-to-son, establishing masculinity and shunning any signs of femininity. Creating female-free zones allows men to create affirming, masculine identities separate from the looked feminine identities, which have been scorned by hegemonic forces (Fields, 2006).

Feminists have argued that the sport industry and the men in power within it has reproduced strict gendered order for generations. Burstyn (1999) argues that many prominent men’s sport leaders “condition and inform the constitution of the gendered social order and its dominant ideology,” along with pursuing the maintenance of that social order (p. 22). Threats to ‘normative’ social order and its ideology are questioned, ostracized, and purged by those in power seeking to uphold the status quo. The process of seeking to retain that power often involves resisting progressive steps that would encourage equality between the genders.

Gender Barriers

Male hegemonic forces have worked within society to establish notions of right and proper behavior and attitudes for the different genders. In the sport industry, this includes types of sport played, specifically which types of sport are deemed 'important' in terms of viewership, participation, and funding. A study by Farrell, Fink, and Fields (2011) found that men dominate and influence these decisions in both men and women. Men's sport is pictured as the only sport that matters and that supporting men's sport and its athletes and institutions is only right and natural.

Researchers have found that when engaging in sport spectatorship and fandom with men, women are treated as the 'other' and not at the level of men in their fandom (De Beauvoir, 1972). In sport, men are regarded as "being the sources of knowledge," even in the face of extraordinary fandom or knowledge from women (p. 195). Men exclude women from conversations about sport and have their knowledge of sport marginalized and trivialized by men. This results in a chilling effect for women, who may fear ridicule and reprisals for making their opinions known, even if they are as knowledgeable as men about sport.

In addition to placing social pressure on women that marks men's sport as the only important type of sport, men at the heart of power have marginalized women's sport by providing limited media coverage of women's sport and devoting less money towards marketing women's sport. 'Sport' has typically been framed and understood solely as 'men's sport' by the media, while women's sport is almost never referred to without a gendered language signifier, essentially signifying 'sport' as 'men's sport' by default (Blinde, Greendorfer, & Shanker, 1991). Prior studies have found that if women's sport is covered by the media, the breadth and depth of coverage simply does not compare to that of men's sport (Christopherson et al., 2002; Duncan &

Messner, 1996; Messner, 2002). Festle (1996) argues that, in large part, the narrative beyond the actions of the game itself, things like storytelling and strategical analysis, are absent from productions and coverage of the women's game despite featuring prominently in the men's game.

Part of the process of societal construction has helped the hegemonic patriarchy establish boundaries of what are proper activities and behaviors for each gender within the participation for each sport. Throughout the twentieth century, such powerful figures have erected onerous boundaries worldwide in almost all sports, including soccer. In Germany a temporary ban of women playing the sport was enacted early in the twentieth century, stating dubiously that "the attractiveness of women, their bodies, and souls will suffer irreparable damage and the public display of their bodies will offend morality and decency," if they played soccer (Grainey, 2012, p. 202).

Caudwell (1999) notes that gender frontiers have proven to be "clearly marked, apparently impermeable and prevalent," while also claiming these frontiers are "socially and culturally constructed and maintained" (p. 401). Additionally, the above study found that those attempting to cross these constructed boundaries, including female soccer players, are often subject to "stereotyping, prejudice, harassment, and abuse" (p.401).

Background

Though systematic research into women's soccer has been scant over the past decade and a half, anecdotal evidence has provided compelling proof that feminist themes have had significant impacts on the everyday marketing practices of women's soccer, both with the USWNT and with the WUSA and WPS and its clubs. Most prominently, the gap in funding felt worldwide and across the sport industry between men's and women's sport has been reflected en

masse in American soccer. Despite the U.S. men's national team's lack of relative success on the field, historically, it still was blessed with a bigger budget, more press attention, and more federation support than the women (Lisi, 2013).

While the 1999 FIFA Women's World Cup shifted the balance slightly, especially in terms of attention in the public eye, the unbalance still lingered for much of the next decade as the popularity of the USWNT waned again (Grainey, 2012). At club level, teams in the WUSA and WPS had to deal with constantly shrinking budgets that made basic functions like advertising next to impossible, in great contrast to the world of men's professional sport, where such budgets have been rising along with media rights contracts for decades.

The disparity in media coverage has bitten women's soccer especially hard. As late as the 1996 Summer Olympics' gold medal match, the USWNT was relegated to being highlight-only fodder (Longman, 2001). Professional leagues have fared much worse. WUSA was shunted to the mostly unheard of PAX-TV after its first season drew microscopic ratings, whereas ESPN kept the faith with Major League Soccer despite consistently disappointing ratings (Markovits & Hellerman, 2001). WPS had a deal with the more reputable Fox Soccer Channel but was forced to split advertising revenue with the network, robbing it of valuable income (Grainey, 2012). It was an indignity wholly uncommon to almost all men's professional sport leagues.

Historically, when women's soccer has received media coverage, it has played towards many of the problems that have plagued most coverage of televised women's sport. In most women's sport coverage, more attention has been paid towards personal lives and personalities of players in lieu of the actual strategic analysis that dominates the coverage of men's sport (Duncan & Messner, 1996; Festle, 1996; Messner, 2002). When looking at coverage of the 1999 FIFA Women's World Cup, Christopherson et al., (2002) found that narratives of subjects like

motherhood, cooperation, and selflessness were pushed by the media in a mostly successful effort to push the USWNT as ideal role models instead of focusing on the fact that the team was immensely gifted talent-wise.

Besides inequitable coverage from the media, other feminist themes have also had major effects on general marketing practices within women's soccer. As has been the case throughout the sport industry and society at large, homophobia has plagued women's soccer for much of its history. While especially harsh homophobic attitudes have lingered overseas, more casual and less overt signals of homophobia took root in the United States (Knoppers & Anthonissen, 2003).

At the height of the USWNT's success in and around the 1999 FIFA Women's World Cup, marketing efforts for the team and the U.S. hosted competition steered clear of associations and implications of homosexuality, instead promoting subjects like empowerment and role model status, two facets common in the promotion of women's sport (Christopherson et al., 2002). Such a focus also blatantly served as a way to appeal to young children and families as a target market, a tactic utilized by many a women's sport team as opposed to men's sport organizations that typically target a young adult male demographic. Both the WUSA and WPS largely shied away overtly promoting their product to an Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) community that likely would have been very receptive to it. Early anecdotal evidence notes that attitudes may be softening though, as notable USWNT players have come out as gay, while also joining groups fighting against homophobia and transphobia in sport (Linehan, 2013).

Additionally, the merchandising of women's soccer has been a vehicle in which women have been able to 'perform' heteronormative femininity by purchasing products marketed by women's soccer organizations. Dating back to when the likes of Mia Hamm was promoting

items like ‘Soccer Barbie’, a brand scorned for being unrealistically proportioned, women’s soccer has had associations with products that typify the zenith of desirable heteronormative feminine traits (Longman, 2001). In WPS, official outfitter Puma introduced uniforms (also available for sale) that were advertised as fusing performance with fashion and featuring feminine flair, drawing largely negative reactions, along with accompanying pink goalkeeper shirts (Sigi, 2009).

Methodology

The purpose of this study was to examine the marketing of professional women’s soccer through themes of feminism. In this research, a case study (cf. Yin, 2013) involving interviews of marketing officials of the NWSL of their experiences in marketing professional women’s soccer was conducted to analyze their perspective and experiences in dealing with feminist issues in addition to the researcher’s collection of archival material, including league and team press releases and print and electronic media marketing artifacts. For further information on this approach and the settings of this case study, please refer to: Chapter 3, Page 39.

Five interviews were conducted with NWSL marketing managers in the Summer of 2014. Interviews took between twenty-two and ninety-five minutes. More specific details on each interview can be found in the table in Appendix E.

Research Context. An effective way to examine feminist themes is through qualitative interviews with stakeholders (Alasuutari, Bickman, & Brannen, 2008). In a women’s soccer marketing context, this was accomplished by speaking with marketing officials of clubs from the current professional league in the U.S., the National Women’s Soccer League (NWSL), to see how these officials engaged with these issues. Beginning play in 2013, the NWSL saw eight founder clubs with top players having salaries subsidized by international federations, while

many other players saw salaries cut greatly from previous leagues. The founder clubs varied greatly, with one affiliated with a Major League Soccer (MLS) club, while others were holdovers from previous leagues. Variability between clubs in areas such as attendance, facilities, and infrastructure was massive, while the league as a whole suffered from a lack of national media coverage that has also plagued women's sports as a whole. Information on participating clubs in this study can be found in the table in Appendix F.

Data Collection. Data for this research was gathered through interviews and the collection of archival material. More details can be found in Chapter 3, Page 45. For data gathering, interviewees were selected from a pool of willing participants associated with NWSL clubs in a management and marketing capacity. Potential participants were e-mailed through publicly accessible accounts found on official team websites with information on the research study. Participants were asked questions from an interview guide cultivated through literature review and background research that focused on the marketing of their team and the league as a whole with an emphasis on marketing through feminist themes.

Data Analyses

The objective of the data analysis for this research was to identify common themes emerging from the data involving the marketing of women's soccer through feminist themes. The researcher conducted content analysis using the qualitative data analysis software ATLAS.ti 7.0 after a thorough review of interview transcripts and documents. The researcher focused on developing case descriptions for each case study setting in regards to their strategy and practices of marketing their product through the use of the specific feminist themes earmarked in the researcher's proposed theoretical framework.

The researcher utilized a cross-case analysis to compare and contrast emergent themes between the different cases to see how different clubs utilize similar or different strategies and practices in their marketing through the feminist themes outlined previously (Yin, 2013). As data from interviews and from archival material was collected, it was both inductively and deductively analyzed through the guidelines established by Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2013), as well as through the constant comparison protocol devised by Glaser and Strauss (1967).

The researcher began the content analysis through a process of open coding, using some of the terminology and themes gathered from the literature review to help begin the process of grouping and categorizing gathered data. Data was coded as simply and succinctly as possible without losing meaning or context, using short, descriptive phrases as codes. Following the process of open coding, the researcher engaged in axial coding to examine relationships and trends that may have risen to the surface after open coding (Corley & Gioia, 2004; Leopkey & Parent, 2009).

An example of some of the open codes used included: ‘ensuring availability of adult apparel in merchandising’, ‘engaging with LGBT community’, and ‘nurturing adult supporter groups’, which combine towards an axial code of ‘targeting markets beyond youth soccer club players and their families’. This evolving process of coding helped provide more nuanced analysis of the data, enabling a more precise picture of the findings and how they related to the proposed theoretical framework. For the sake of consistency, the researcher used the constant comparison techniques set out by Glaser and Strauss (1967), comparing the already gathered literature, the archival material collected, and the interview data.

Initial data analysis focused on the collected archival material, specifically, the print and electronic artifacts gathered by the researcher in relation to both the five NWSL clubs serving as case study settings, as well as the league itself. Some of the print documents examined included newspaper and magazine clippings detailing the league and its clubs and more specifically, its marketing activities, as well as any physical press releases sent out by the clubs and league, along with other artifacts such as printed team media guides that may touch on marketing. Some of the electronic artifacts examined included electronic press releases from the league and clubs, electronic news articles from third-parties, and social media activity (Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, etc.), a medium that has grown increasingly important for clubs as they try to reach a niche audience. Team and league produced audiovisual content was also examined for the purposes of this study. In total, this study gathered two hundred eighty-nine pages of archival material.

Results

When discussing ways in which the use of feminist themes in marketing had affected overall marketing campaigns for clubs, interviewed officials came back repeatedly to three distinct areas: the target markets which the club aimed to bring in for sales, attracting the media both old and new, and generating as many streams of revenue as possible to stay viable as a business. This section discusses in detail the effects that feminist themes have on these areas of marketing for NWSL clubs.

Kids or diehards? Stars or the shield? Target market debates. Historically, purveyors of women's sport have first and foremost tried to attract youth audiences and families with their product, preaching a product featuring athletes touted as role models and a wholesome environment in which matches are played (Sugden, 1994). Such a mindset has been short-sighted

with both sponsors who covet the young adult male demographic instead and with other sets of fans who may not fit into the soccer parent or youth demographic and have been turned off by such a focus on marketing towards youth and families (Grainey, 2012; Longman, 2003). Failures in the WUSA and WPS have prompted re-examination into which markets teams should focus their efforts to appeal to.

The age battle. Much of the marketing debate that has raged through different iterations of professional women's soccer has concerned which markets teams have appealed to in trying to draw an audience. The fall back has seemingly on the youth market, an emphasis that has rankled some. According to Ryan Wood of the Boston Breakers, his organization tried actively to court markets beyond the typical youth clubs. Wood noted that his organization aimed to provide an atmosphere that also appealed to older soccer fans as well. Boston Breakers player Joanna Lohman was in fact one of the staunchest advocates for a more 'adult' atmosphere, with Wood noting that Lohman wanted "to have the rowdy beer drinking fans at the games just like you see at the men's games just people like yelling and screaming" (Wood, personal communication, July 23, 2014). Brian Budzinski of FC Kansas City also noted his club trying to appeal to a market beyond youth soccer players, aiming their product at "anybody that appreciates or wants to sample high level soccer" (personal communication, July 24, 2014).

Portland's Mike Golub was one of the most ardent advocates of having an older and more diverse live audience for his club. He explained that, "We market to people who love the sport and who want to see the best women in the world play in arguably the best league in the world," thus promoting the idea that the Thorns appeal to the soccer enthusiast (personal communication, July 30, 2014). Golub made sure to emphasize this viewpoint as a major plank of the club's marketing platform to fans. However, Golub also mentioned that while some overlap between

Timbers and Thorns season ticket holders existed, the majority of the NWSL club's season ticket holders were *not* Timbers season ticket holders, perhaps indicating that 'soccer enthusiast' and 'women's soccer enthusiast' are perhaps not as closely related as some would like at this point. However, Golub was also quick to point out that the Thorns' audience was a distinct one that was still very passionate about the women's game.

Alyse Lahue of Chicago also noted that her club was eager to embrace the young adult soccer fan market, albeit, as a secondary market after the youth market in the region. She mentioned that this may also extend into targeting the 'soccer dads' that have traditionally done much of the ticket buying for sports events in the past and which the 1999 Women's World Cup organizers did so well in targeting for ticket sales. Lahue lauded the city and the region's legion of supporters' groups of younger fans in their twenties and thirties, a market made more accessible by some informal links the Red Stars have cultivated with the Chicago Fire of Major League Soccer.

While the Red Stars are not officially under the Fire's corporate umbrella, the help provided in access to a market with potential has been invaluable for the growth of the NWSL club. Such links and the doubleheader with the Fire in 2014 allowed the Red Stars to increase awareness of the club and potentially promote fans to come out to games in the club's usual Bridgeview home venue. However, some other attempts to put together doubleheaders with other men's teams, such as holding a match at Soldier Field after a friendly between European sides Liverpool and Olympiakos, have proven harder to hammer out. While the club had gotten approval from their opponent and had done a walkthrough at the stadium, the league nixed the plan at the last minute for reasons that were left unsaid. Such opportunities, with a potential

thirty-thousand fans in a stadium that weren't familiar with the NWSL product, do not come around often, making the league's refusal to capitalize on such an opportunity puzzling.

However, practicality and pragmatism was also a big point among the interviewed club officials. Wood opined that aiming for youth to come to the game was a must as "you're gonna get soccer clubs and soccer teams to come to the game," alluding to the difficulty of attracting other groups with consistency, as well as the relief of getting large injections of money through block ticket sales (personal communication, July 23, 2014). Gooley noted that selling ticket packages in bulk was a major goal when going to clubs to try and make sales. Budzinski also emphasized his club's focus on the youth market, especially girl soccer players, but also noted that it was a focus that "not everyone agrees with" (personal communication, July 24, 2014).

Wood and Gooley claimed that their clubs went directly towards youth soccer players and their parents with their appeals. Much of this is accomplished by going straight to youth soccer organizations and youth club teams. Interestingly, Wood claimed that Boston not only tried to sell their matchday experience but also camps and clinics run by the club in an effort to try and tout every revenue stream the club tries to capture. Gooley tried to sweeten the deal by bringing players to clubs he had spoken to try to entice sales as well.

Wood and Gooley also were quick to note that their clubs didn't just try to capture individual youth players and their parents but entire teams. Gooley claimed that he could hit over a thousand families by just speaking to a single club in the New Jersey area. For sheer efficiency's sake, this would appear to be a solid method in trying to maximize attendance potential for youth players and clubs. Club officials appear to have recognized this and, according to Wood, have even posted a giant map of the region in club offices to better detail

where group ticket sales are coming from to best allow for the allocation of often limited resources as the club tries to gain renewals or attract new clubs.

Alyse Lahue of the Chicago Red Stars claimed that her organization aimed to attract the “low hanging fruit”, elaborating:

the low hanging fruit is that we've got twenty thousand members strong Illinois women's soccer league which is sort of the umbrella organization for all of the youth female soccer players as well as any of the amateur female soccer players up through the adult ages. So we have access to those players through the Illinois women's soccer league, and they're a great partner of ours (personal communication, July 31, 2014).

Lahue emphasized that increasing this group’s awareness of the club was a big goal, trying to ensure that these ‘low-hanging fruit’ would know everything they can about the club, including the team’s schedule. According to Lahue, the Red Stars also, naturally, try and target the families of those young players, as they are a demographic fit for the club and are most accessible in marketing efforts. Such a demographic is also appealing to sponsors in Lahue’s eyes, and the Chicago general manager argued that these affluent families are a big target for companies, so trying to bring this demographic into the stadium may also bring in sponsors as well.

Jim Gooley of Sky Blue FC was also adamant at the value his club and their target demographic had to sponsors. Gooley claimed that when the club talked (or played), that the people listening are the hundreds of thousands of soccer families in the New Jersey area who are dialed into the club via social media and e-mail. Gooley called it a “highly filtered” market that fell into the middle and upper-classes with college educations and technology, forming a customer base that is very appealing to prospective sponsors (personal communication, August 13, 2014).

Like Boston, Chicago also tried to lure groups of young female soccer players out to the stadium with various club nights. Lahue spoke of relationship building with these clubs and local organizations that, hopefully, bring out groups of fifty to one hundred at a time to maximize revenue potential. The Red Stars GM exclaimed that if, “you start to pull ten to twenty of those groups every game and you're looking in a pretty good position,” with the money coming in from chunks of attendees adding up fast, especially in comparison to individual sales (personal communication, July 31, 2014). Such markets, in addition to the female market, have been in the lead for merchandise sales for Chicago as well according to Lahue.

Rather than just offer discounts on group ticket sales, Wood noted that the Breakers tried to further incentivize group ticket sales to youth clubs with further perks. Specifically, Boston offered player meet and greets before and/or after matches, opportunities to have pictures taken with players after matches, and the opportunity to walk with the players out onto the field for player introductions. Wood argued that many of the young soccer players “already know these players' names and big stars around the league, and they wanna come see them,” leading to the club wanting to take advantage of one of the few groups that may recognize the club’s players (personal communication, July 23, 2014). Additionally, many of the ancillary activities in the pavilions for the Breakers are tailored towards the youth market, like facepainting and giant slides, with Wood noting that many young fans and their parents arrive in advance of the game to partake in these activities.

Specialized perks were also a major part of Sky Blue FC’s gameplan, according to Gooley, with the director of sales claiming that clubs were craving a “personal touch” when being dealt with (personal communication, August 13, 2014). As is the case with Boston, Gooley says his club offers opportunities to go out onto the field for player introductions, to serve as ball

girls, to have tailgating parties before the match, and to have autograph sessions after the match. Gooley claims that the clubs they've offered these experiences have responded positively and come in "boatloads", taking advantage of what Gooley dubbed as a "highly social" experience for the girls they're targeting (personal communication, August 13, 2014). He noted that girls from nine to fifteen years of age have provided the biggest response, underlining the club's devotion to this part of the youth market.

At the same time though, the dogged pursuit of the youth market does have a very real downside according to some. Wood noted that at least one potential sponsor has blanched on a possible deal due to worries that the primarily youth-centric audience captured by NWSL clubs is incompatible with the product that the sponsor is trying to sell. However, Budzinski noted that FC Kansas City was poised to capture certain sponsors *because* of a focus on the youth and family market. He explained:

Some sponsors, some sponsors have demographics that they have to...they're required by their corporation to market to. Whether that's males over thirty-five or that's females or that's Hispanics or whatever it may be. Certain corporations <unintelligible> have dedicated dollars that they have to have, that are budgeted for different types of demographics. So for those, listen, we've got the only game in town in Kansas City. If you're interested in marketing to women and families then we're the only game in town (personal communication, July 24, 2014).

Older markets & LGBT markets. Catering to younger fans and families may alienate some older supporters, however, as Wood mentioned the dwindling number of supporters groups of adult fans as compared to the heyday of the WPS, which featured Boston's outspoken Riptide supporters group. Wood noted of previous complaints in WPS about the Riptide's behaviour,

though he also was quick to note that such behaviour was, in his eyes, tame compared to what happens in other, collegiate and professional men's sports. In Wood's eyes, having to mollify parents of youth players unhappy with typical fan behaviour may have led supporters groups to become "sick of dealing with or just not having the freedom to cheer like they do at other sporting events," leading to such groups dying away in the first few years of the NWSL (personal communication, July 23, 2014).

Focusing too much on the youth market has also limited some clubs in their pursuit of media opportunities and coverage. Budzinski noted that the sports talk radio stations in the Kansas City area skewed to the male over thirty-five demographic, making it hard to successfully pitch their product to station managers who may see it as solely a venture for families and young soccer players.

Another conflict involving the family/youth market that was mentioned by Wood involved the LGBT community. While he did not directly accuse a part of his club's fanbase of homophobia, Wood did note that many parents at the game had an "old school mentality," an indirect reference to perhaps a more intolerant age, where persecution and disapproval of the LGBT community was a very real problem (personal communication, July 23, 2014). Wood claimed that the club always had to be mindful of how some issues were promoted and marketed, reasoning that catering overtly to the LGBT community could offend some of the parents of the young spectators, but at the same time knowing that completely ignoring the LGBT community could be just as poisonous to the image of the club in the long run.

The battle between catering to the youth and family market and an older audience is also reflected in merchandising, according to Wood. He noted that most of the club's early offerings were "a lot of normal stuff for kids like youth size kits, youth size t-shirts or what not," to try and

tap into a ready and willing market that was eager to purchase merchandise (personal communication, July 23, 2014). However, he also acknowledged that as time passed, the increase in demand for adult sized apparel was such that the club had little choice but to acquiesce to the demand in order to maximize revenue.

Star power or team power? The other major marketing debate for NWSL teams early in the league's two-year history has revolved on who exactly to market for upcoming matches in terms of the star players on opposition teams, usually members of the U.S. Women's National Team, Canadian Women's National Team, or a handful of European or Asian stars, or the opposition team themselves without any specific regard for the stars on that team. Per the discussions with NWSL marketing officials, strategies varied widely on this topic.

Jim Gooley of Sky Blue FC was perhaps the most adamant of the interviewed marketing officials in touting his own team's stars, and specifically, their stories, in building up a narrative for the club and for matches. Gooley was quick to tout the example of Nadia Nadim, who turned into one of the club's star players in the 2014 season. An Afghani refugee who fled the Taliban and became a Danish soccer star after taking up the game in her new country, Nadim is one of her country's brightest young stars. Gooley exclaimed that he aims to "take this whole story and shrink wrap the thing," for different media outlets like CBS and ESPN, who Gooley claims has expressed amazement at the story (personal communication, August 13, 2014).

Gooley goes on to claim that telling the media that there's a game tonight just won't cut it considering the stature of the league. He elaborates:

When you personalize things, it's that personal interest, that's where the drama begins.

That's when people tune in... And that's really, in my m.o. coming into Sky Blue is to get

stories out, get the faces out, and you'll see our advertising (personal communication, August 13, 2014).

Gooley went on to talk about the mindset of his marketing, claiming that, in his mind, it was about marketing the matchups between players instead of between teams. He provided the example of touting the matchup between Sky Blue FC's legendary defender Christie Rampone and Western New York's scoring machine Abby Wambach. Gooley says he goes to the media with the tagline of "an unstoppable force meets an immovable object," believing that that is more effective than merely giving the matchup of Sky Blue FC and Western New York and trying to sell the public on that (personal communication, August 13, 2014).

Ryan Wood of the Breakers claimed that his club generally gravitated towards being big on promoting opposing stars rather than the opposing team in general. Relatively speaking, Wood was also a bit disappointed in the general notion of promoting the opposing players *or* the opposing team, noting "you should be saying come see our players rather than come for the opposition" (personal communication, July 23, 2014). Nevertheless, Wood noted that having the ability to see big stars was a big selling point for the Boston Breakers as they tried to put together ticket packages to sell to consumers. Still, Wood elaborated on his annoyance at resorting to promoting the opposition instead of the club's own star players:

Why do we have to promote Alex Morgan, when we have Sydney Leroux or Heather O'Reilly? You should be coming out to see our team, not...we shouldn't have to beg you to come see our team or kind of dangle a star in front of your face to get you to come out to a game (personal communication, July 23, 2014).

Brian Budzinski of FC Kansas City showed the most vehement reaction against marketing big stars above teams as a whole. Budzinski claimed "we don't feel like when we play

the Portland Thorns it's Alex Morgan and the Portland Thorns. We want to get away from that. We want it to be the Portland Thorns” (personal communication, July 24, 2014). He elaborated further that the club tried to spread out its marketing focus to some of its other talented players that may not be household names for the public. Budzinski was pragmatic though, noting that such a slant would probably not be able to be fully implemented for half a decade in his eyes. It should be noted that on the club’s playoff match program handed out before the game against Portland, that both Alex Morgan of Portland and Lauren Holiday of FC Kansas City were spotlighted front and centre and the cover of said program.

With FC Kansas City not having as many household names despite their massive reserves of talent, such a strategy makes perfect sense. However, Portland, arguably the team with the most star power in the league also would seem to ascribe to that theory. Despite boasting the likes of Alex Morgan, Christine Sinclair, and Nadine Angerer, all amongst the most popular women’s players in their nation, team president Mike Golub argued that the club’s overall marketing platform has been mainly focused on selling the team and an organization as a whole instead of just the stars first and foremost.

Leveraging the media, new and old. The battle for the attention of the media in women’s sport and women’s soccer in particular has raged for decades. The USWNT was far from immune before the triumph of the 1999 FIFA Women’s World Cup, seeing games snipped to highlight form or not covered at all by the traditional media (Longman, 2001). The two previous professional leagues have fared even worse, with most games shunted to obscure channels or not covered at all, in addition to battles to get print media coverage of matches in hometown media (Grainey, 2012). While WPS had seemingly made inroads through social media in the middle of its lifespan, the league foolishly cut their new media manager, Amanda

Vandervort, as a part of cost-cutting in an incredibly short-sighted move (Pel, 2010). How to close the gap in media coverage with men's sport has been a constant topic of discussion for NWSL clubs.

The traditional media. With limited resources and marginal name and brand value outside of a cache of diehards, NWSL clubs have had to battle to attract media attention in both traditional channels, as well as new media enterprises. The struggle to net a consistent television deal has been felt through both seasons of the league, with only a handful of matches telecast on Fox Soccer/Fox Sports One (season one) and ESPN (season two) each season, including all playoff matches. Additionally, FC Kansas City (Time Warner Cable), Houston (CSN Houston), and Portland (CSN Portland) have inked regional television deals, but said productions do not have the same reach as national television deals nor the same level of production values. Most fans who want to catch all of their team's home matches must instead resort to the league's internet streaming package.

The absence of a concrete television deal has irked some of the interviewed marketing officials, including Mike Golub of the Thorns. Ryan Wood of the Boston Breakers questioned why, given the links between NBC Sports Channel and U.S. Soccer and U.S. Soccer's subsidization of the NWSL, the network could not be the televised home for the league or at least air some commercials touting the league. Alyse Lahue of Chicago also bemoaned the lack of a full season ESPN deal, though she did appreciate having a handful of games on, as the reach of the network far outpaces that of the league's YouTube streaming. The lack of a consistent television deal has also robbed teams and the league of chances at ancillary coverage. Brian Budzinski of FC Kansas City openly wondered if the league and clubs could benefit more by getting some of their highlights to go 'viral' on highlight programs like SportsCenter on ESPN.

However, Budzinski noted that his club's regional television deal with Time Warner Cable allowed the club to benefit with programs showcasing interviews of players and other human interest stories involving the club. Alyse Lahue of Chicago did note that after playing at Portland that highlights and a press conference of the match was shown on local television, a fact that "astounded" the Red Stars general manager (personal communication, July 31, 2014). She indicated that that type of in-depth coverage was far from the norm in her home market, where even getting scores reported can be seen as an accomplishment.

The lack of a stable television deal has prompted the league to mandate streaming of all matches, nominally in high definition with announcers and multiple camera angles. Lahue praised YouTube as the streaming service used, claiming it was an invaluable tool to keep fans connected to the teams and able to watch every game as the season progresses. Lahue also noted that despite some growing pains, the service was also free, with the no-cost angle helping perhaps lure in some consumers that would have otherwise blanched if forced to pay a fee to watch matches. Gooley noted that the streaming is effective in another way, in that it opens up an international audience for the league. The Sky Blue FC director of sales said that seventy or eighty countries get the stream, especially helpful for clubs like them with stars with international appeal, like Afghani refugee Nadia Nadim, with Afghanis among the countries streaming the league's matches.

However, while this granted exposure, it also has put a financial burden on teams without infrastructure already existing through Major League Soccer links. Wood of the Boston Breakers claimed the streaming production company used in 2013 cost \$60,000, and that a subscription plan did not ultimately allow them to recoup the expenses, though the service used this past season offered much more quality for value according to Wood.

Wood also spoke of the struggles in bringing the print media back into the fold after the failure of two previous professional leagues. Wood noted that “it was really hard to get the major newspapers back again,” during the NWSL’s first season in 2013, indicating that some of the media may have been confused and driven to apathy by the constant changes in leagues and professional status that the Breakers went through between 2011-2013 (personal communication, July 23, 2014). Mike Golub of Portland also was quick to point out that this was the third attempt at professional women’s soccer in the U.S. and that there was a long road ahead of the league in terms of getting equitable media coverage but that early signs had been encouraging. At the same time though, Wood also noted that in his market, competition from men’s professional sports teams in Boston, especially in such a sports crazed city, did not make courting attention easier either.

Gooley of Sky Blue FC also expressed disappointment in print media coverage of the league as a whole, keying in on local newspapers. He noted that print media coverage of both men’s and women’s soccer was disappointing in his eyes and that media conglomerates like Gannett were missing an opportunity by ignoring soccer in their print enterprises. At the same time though, Gooley did acknowledge the issues in readership print media was having and questioned whether online newspaper sites were still draws for the younger consumer in search of news and entertainment.

Markets with fewer sporting options and less of a failed history with professional women’s soccer like Kansas City have generally found more success with the media. Budzinski notes that his club, instead of just hoping for sparse coverage, actually has a beat reporter from the Kansas City Star for both seasons the club has existed in addition to other local print

publications that put out occasional content. Supplementing those print media reporters are multiple bloggers covering FC Kansas City, according to Budzinski.

Stability has helped with Boston though, according to Wood. He noted that with the club playing in the same league in successive seasons for the first time since 2010-2011 in WPS, the Breakers finally got a reporter from the Boston Herald, the city's second largest newspaper to cover every home game. Additionally, Wood confirmed that the Breakers gained the services of a beat reporter from the Boston Herald. Wood also was quick to point out that other sources of coverage besides the major newspapers played a strong role in giving consistent coverage to the team, with small local newspaper and internet bloggers cropping up at an increasing rate as the league found a foothold in its second season.

Some of these smaller print media sources proved more receptive to clubs in big cities that struggled to attract the attention of the bigger dailies. Lahue spoke of the 'Red Eye' free Chicago newspaper that pictured Red Stars player Jackie Santacaterina along with cousin Mike Magee, a well renowned player for the city's Major League Soccer team, the Fire. It was a major coup for the club to get a player onto the cover a newspaper, no matter the size, in her Red Stars uniform. These rare opportunities have proven to be fantastic press for fledgling NWSL clubs.

Ignorance of the Boston club still persists in television and radio though, according to Wood, who recounts a story of hearing a conversation on a sports talk radio show where:

the guys started talking about women's soccer, how they remembered the '99 World Cup and Mia Hamm and what's happened since then. Someone, one of them, said it'd be good if we had a professional league, and I think one of the other guys said that they do. And they said 'well it'd be great if Boston could get a team, because maybe I'd go check out some games'. Which, right there you think, right when I heard that, I'm driving home

one day and I said ‘alright, I obviously haven't done my job well enough, because these guys don't know about us’ (personal communication, July 23, 2014).

Ironically, Wood mentions that that same station actually had a Breakers staff member working for the radio station, only underlining how hard making actual media connections is, even when said connections appear obvious and at arm’s length.

Budzinski also noted some of the difficulties dealing with radio, with most sports talk stations uninterested in a product typecast as a venture for kids, which hardly meshes with the older male demographic that such stations cater to. He indicated that instead, FC Kansas City tried to engage FM stations that target a younger demographic, noting that they’ve partnered with some disc jockeys to allow themselves opportunities to talk about upcoming games and promotions.

Attracting attention. Wood spoke at length about measures from other professional women’s soccer leagues around he hoped the NWSL would emulate in order to attract media attention. Specifically, Wood mentioned the activities of Australia’s W-League, with whom he had spoken with about their annual launch party, which he described as a rousing success. He described the plan as:

what these guys did in Australia was basically called every sports newspaper, TV station in each of the cities that have a team in the W-League, invited them to Sydney, basically for lunch and said ‘We'll pay for your lunch. Come down, have something to eat it's a really nice venue and then, hey, while you're here, we're going to introduce the players and teams. We're going to do a photo shoot down on the beach. You can talk to the players if you want to. If not, at the very least, come down and get a free lunch out of it’ (personal communication, July 23, 2014).

Wood claimed that the Australian PR reps told him that, surprisingly, almost everyone invited to the launch party came and later provided great media coverage of the event and the league. To that point, the Australian W-League ended up getting on the front of the sports page in major newspapers, just as unheard of in Australia for women's sports as it is in the United States.

Such a charm offensive would appear to be a natural fit for a nascent league like the NWSL, which Wood acknowledges enthusiastically, but the Boston Breakers' former communications director also speaks of some of the difficulties based on the differences between the United States and Australia. Mainly, Wood notes that the sheer size and breadth of the U.S. would likely discourage some from attending, but he still believes that the league would still draw enough media figures to get thorough coverage in newspapers, and, perhaps, local television affiliates and/or dedicated sports networks. Considering the difficulty in negotiating a stable television package for the league, wooing television officials could well be a masterstroke in the long run. Additionally, Wood claimed that in addition to increased media coverage, the league saw attendance increase across the board in each city. For a league that has struggled with attracting fans at times like the NWSL has, that alone may be enough to follow Wood's recommendation and mimic the Australian W-League's launch party plan.

Lahue of the Chicago Red Stars also spoke of ways to attract the media to cover the team. A big believer in just getting the media in the door to see the product, Lahue noted that the club held special 'media VIP nights' at a few of the Red Stars' games to try and attract new members of the working media. Lahue claims that "it's a good way to hook them, and they're usually willing to come back after that point," and that once the media does come out to matches, they can see the true value of the product and keep coming back and covering it (personal communication, July 31, 2014).

Yet for all of the potential one-time promotional gimmicks, much of attracting attention comes down to what Lahue dubs “hand-to-hand combat”, the inglorious art of calling sports reporters for major and minor newspapers and television stations alike multiple times (personal communication, July 31, 2014). Besides being an invitation, the calls serve as a reminder as to the existence of the club. This existence is hard to keep front and centre in a big city like Chicago, necessitating the repetition from the club’s management. Lahue also mentioned that the doubleheader the club had at Toyota Park with the Chicago Fire MLS club on one weekend in 2014 had served as a major boost, with major media already there to cover the MLS match and willing to cover the NWSL game as well. The Chicago general manager noted that a few more opportunities like that in the future would really help the club out with market exposure from the media in such a saturated market.

While some have mooted ways to draw new members of the media to cover the league, others have done everything in their power to keep the media that are committed to teams and the league loyal and engaged. Budzinski lauded FC Kansas City for their openness and honesty with the media while also aiming for his organization to be as flexible and accommodating as possible with the media. Budzinski elaborates that:

At times, we're so accommodating that we've...coaches allowed certain players to miss practice so that they can go and do a morning show and/or allowed a practice to start a little bit late or change the time for practice, because TV's going to come out there. A lot of times we make accommodations, because we feel it's important to get that coverage out there (personal communication, July 24, 2014).

This attitude is in stark contrast to that of most men's professional teams, who set rigorous schedules with certain times allotted for media activities, with the media often accommodating the whims of the team instead of the other way around.

Part of the job in attracting attention for clubs goes beyond just drawing the media towards teams but also towards drawing the media towards different players than the typical hot ticket U.S. Women's National Team players or the occasional international superstar. Ryan Wood spoke of Boston's mutually beneficial relationship with the *New England Soccer Journal*, a magazine that offered up monthly features on Breakers players. Wood pointed out that the club encouraged the magazine to "spotlight someone who doesn't play that much or starts but isn't a star," in an effort to increase recognition and notoriety of those players who aren't commonly in the media spotlight, like many of the USWNT'ers are (personal communication, July 23, 2014).

But attention invariably flows towards the U.S. Women's National Team players more than any other. Jim Gooley of Sky Blue FC mentions that the upcoming FIFA Women's World Cup in 2015 has led to increased attention for clubs' USWNT players. Gooley notes that major media outlets like CBS, ESPN, FOX, and Sports Illustrated have been coming to matches in 2014 to talk to USWNT players and other international players that are expected to feature at the 2015 Women's World Cup. While the USWNT and international players remain the draw, the teams are not complaining about the increased media attention their clubs receive in the bargain.

New/Social media. Clubs spoke of different strategies with different forms of new/social media. Ryan Wood of Boston noted that Twitter was more of an informational tool for ticket sales and news, while Facebook was used in a more interactive sense. FC Kansas City's Brian Budzinski noted that Twitter offered up a more global fanbase that might help fans stay connected while gathering information but that he didn't know if Twitter would necessarily help

out with local ticket sales. Mike Golub of Portland also spoke of social media being an informational tool for the club to keep fans informed.

Budzinski claimed that Facebook was “much more specific and targeted to the Kansas City area and the midwest in general,” allowing the club to market effectively within the region and not just Kansas City itself, with a diversified base within the region clearly a high priority for the club (personal communication, July 24, 2014). Budzinski also noted the ability to target and control the marketing message more as a key difference between Facebook and Twitter in the eyes of his club. Boston used Facebook to gather feedback upon their activities, including camps and clinics, while also promoting new ideas from the community to integrate into their plans.

Budzinski of FC Kansas City also noted that social media was used for feedback as well, with the club collating some online responses from their reveal of their initial team crest/logo and combining it with feedback from other sources to better design a more professional, representative product for the team. Golub also spoke of social media being used for interactivity between the team and supporters, allowing two-way communication on an everyday basis. He also noted that this communication occurred between fans of the club as well, allowing for an organic growth of a vibrant Thorns fan community that can speak with each other from across the country or across the world. Additionally, Gooley felt that social media was phenomenal for getting and keeping a community of fans involved with the team.

Likewise, Alyse Lahue of the Red Stars also praised social media services like Twitter for allowing interactive dialogue between management and fans. Lahue stressed the importance of being responsive to concerns and feedback, noting that despite some drawbacks, social media interaction was a great way to have a dialogue with fans that is hard or impossible through conventional mass media networks. At the same time though, Lahue noted that the reach of

social media was not as extensive as the mass media in her eyes at the moment, though the affordability of social media was listed as a desirable trade-off, especially given the expenses of waging mass media marketing campaigns in a big city like Chicago.

Jim Gooley of Sky Blue FC stressed the importance of utilizing new media and social media in a club's overall marketing plan. Gooley spoke of "activating" the club's fanbase on Twitter and Facebook to try and enhance message response on the club's marketing activities (personal communication, August 13, 2014). Like many of the other interviewed marketing officials, Gooley noted that social media platforms were becoming increasingly important in fans' getting information and in communication between club and fans, but that additionally, fans were getting more of their entertainment options through new and social media as well. Gooley indicated that leveraging these platforms was a major part of the club's current and future marketing plans.

Specifically, Gooley was quick to point out the key differences between using social media and the traditional media in targeting consumers. He noted that ads in such traditional media as newspapers are overly broad, and that while clubs might be paying for a circulation in the hundreds of thousands, it's, in essence, a scattergun search, as many who read the paper are not the main target for the ad or simply will not respond to the ad. Similarly, Gooley notes that measures such as billboards are equally ineffective, as many driving by the billboard are simply not native to the area and will not buy tickets under any circumstance.

Instead, Gooley speaks of the power of new and social media allowing fans to "opt-in", allowing the club and the league to speak directly to people who are interested in the product already (personal communication, August 13, 2014). Gooley elaborated on how important it was to be able to grow this "base" of consumers who are opting-in to the product:

I find the nicest part about that is when I go to my advertisers and my sponsors, and I say, ‘look, we’ve got fifteen thousand followers here or twenty thousand followers there. Those people want to know what we have to say and what we’re up to’. So with that said, I can go to a company and be like ‘do you want to advertise with us, we’ve got tens of thousands of followers who listen to what we have to say and also what we have to sell?’ (personal communication, August 13, 2014).

In essence, social media has not just given a way for clubs and the league to keep fans informed but also has given clubs a new tool with which they can make their case to prospective sponsors and supporters.

Beyond free social media services, some clubs tried to tap into for profit online businesses and tools to try and expand their market. Wood spoke of using Boston website “Bostinno” as a promotion tool, paying to try and promote the team and product (personal communication, July 23, 2014). However, tangible results proved difficult to gauge, leading to the club cancelling the service after just one month. Similarly, questionable results and budget limitations led to Boston nixing targeted Facebook and Twitter ads in short measure.

While all of the interviewed officials expressed their happiness at having social media tools with which to aide their marketing efforts, Gooley of Sky Blue FC also expressed a little concern about social media in the past. Gooley even called social media a “dangerous” tool upon its advent, claiming that “It was like here are two of the keys to a Ferrari, go ahead, and people making wrong turns, people doing wrong things, will make, taking pictures of themselves or saying the wrong things” (personal communication, August 13, 2014).

The Sky Blue FC director of sales claimed that those mistakes were being made big and fast and that the world was witness to many of them, though he also noted that everyone has

gotten smarter about social media use with time. He was particularly adamant that negative happenings on social media, like Twitter, amplified and often got twisted to an unsavoury degree. Gooley gave examples of unnamed players from other teams disparaging the club's venue or Sky Blue FC itself, in which players were tagged as being "negative", with the original intent of the originator of the message being lost (personal communication, August 13, 2014). It is clear that while social media possesses much power, not all of that power is harnessed for best purposes at all times.

Here comes the money: Sponsorship, stadiums, and other revenue streams. In the arena of major men's professional sport, media rights fees have supercharged the budgets of clubs to the point that sponsorships, stadium revenue, and merchandising are secondary (but still valuable) sources of revenue. With women's sport however, media rights fees are non-existent, meaning sponsorship, stadium revenue, and merchandising can ensure viability if done correctly or be a nail in a club or league's coffin if bungled. A lack of sponsorship effectively torpedoed both the WUSA and WPS, while a toxic stadium lease took down Chicago in WPS (Grainey, 2012). Striking the perfect balance of pleasing fans and balancing the books has been seen as critical in the formative years of the NWSL.

Sponsorship. Sponsorship in NWSL, as is the case with many other smaller professional sports without giant media contracts, is often the difference between viability and death for franchises. With national sponsorships not close to the level of that of other men's professional leagues as of yet, clubs have largely had to rely on team sponsorships for revenue in the words of Portland's Mike Golub. While some of the holdover clubs from previous professional leagues were able to call upon loyal sponsors, other clubs were either forced to start from scratch with sponsorship or rely on existing connections to seal sponsorship deals.

In many cases, this may involve using relationships built from a company's sponsorship of men's teams in the organization to encourage sponsorship of the corresponding women's team. Golub confirmed as much, noting that the Thorns' specific sponsors were joined by many of the Timbers' sponsors in the end. This included the club's shirt sponsor, Providence Health Systems, as well as Alaska Airlines, another long time Timbers sponsor. Other sponsors like McDonald's had done business with the Timbers in the past and were tempted back by the opportunity to partner with the Thorns. Golub emphasized that the club did not just fall back on Timbers sponsors though, adding names like Parklane Mattress to give the club a roster of diverse sponsors, both old and new to the organization.

Brian Budzinski of FC Kansas City acknowledged the "existing relationship in the community and the marketplace with various sponsors, community leaders, business leaders, small business owners," fostered from the Major Arena Soccer League's Missouri Comets, operated by the same management group as FCKC, and the NWSL club (personal communication, July 24, 2014). The organization's sales staff reached out to these familiar sponsors in an effort to bring them on board with sponsoring the women's professional team as well. Budzinski also noted that different sponsors may have different rationales as to why they would support a professional women's soccer team. He surmised that some wanted to support women's professional soccer in general, while others wanted to ensure that that sport stayed in their city. Left unspoken was the notion that winning and success might also draw sponsors to an organization.

Alyse Lahue of the Chicago Red Stars was quick to mention volume as a key goal in sponsorship strategy for the club in the first few years of the NWSL, noting that the club aimed to:

bring on as many partners as we can, because that's for us, we need to get them in the door and take a year or two to give them a really good experience and show them how we're growing and growing as a league. So no matter how big or small it is, we're open to having twenty partners essentially or thirty partners in the first couple years (personal communication, July 31, 2014).

Lahue further explained that getting everyone in the door and back engaged was a challenge considering some had developed cold feet about professional women's soccer following the failure of two earlier leagues. The consensus was that companies wanted to make sure year two was a reality before going all-in.

Golub and Portland framed sponsorship pitches to potential sponsors as a partnership that made good business sense for the sponsor. Golub explained that the club tried to “understand and learn what the business is trying to accomplish and then try to put forward a compelling set of assets and opportunities for that sponsor to achieve those objectives” (personal communication, July 30, 2014). By working with sponsoring companies to try and fulfil pertinent marketing goals by providing opportunities to interact with a valuable asset, the Thorns club, Golub claims that Portland has achieved “incredible” retention with sponsors (personal communication, July 30, 2014).

Lahue noted that sponsors that also made sense from a sporting perspective were also in demand. The Chicago general manager mentioned the ‘Teamsnap’ app, a sports management piece of software that works with a variety of different teams in different sports. Such sponsors likely see the value of associating themselves with sports clubs and a willing audience, and in turn, patrons of the sports clubs may see the value of such a product given their proclivity for sports participation and attendance.

According to Ryan Wood of the Boston Breakers, the club's management provided great flexibility to possible sponsors, offering up a multitude of options, noting that "they could be on the jersey, they could be in the gameday programs, they could just be in the media guide, advertising the live stream," amongst other possibilities (personal communication, July 23, 2014). The flexibility allowed Boston to sign up around twenty sponsors, each paying a different amount for a variety of packages from shirt sponsorships to field boards to newsletter logos. Lahue noted that her club was also flexible with sponsorship, while also being affordable, a commodity that other teams in sports mad Chicago cannot necessarily claim. Gooley was sure to note that Sky Blue FC also provided a multitude of electronic options for potential sponsors, such as advertising on the club's website, as well as gameday options such as having paid for announcements at matches themselves. He also noted that some clubs would pitch towards sponsors the potential to be the official brand of that type of product for the team, which would get copious mentions by the club all season long.

Despite some of this flexibility, shirt sponsorship was still considered the big get, with Wood noting that Boston's 2013 main shirt sponsorship from Ocean Spray netted between \$60,000-100,000 which, while some way less than what some WPS shirt sponsorships fetched, was still a major source of revenue for the club. As is the case with some smaller men's professional soccer leagues, smaller space on jerseys has also been sold to companies, with Boston gaining between \$5,000-10,000 from a sleeve sponsor.

Budzinski spoke of FC Kansas City management's desire to "overdeliver", no matter the level of investment from sponsors (personal communication, July 24, 2014). A policy of constant engagement with sponsors, from the club's sales staff, to management, to players was touted by Budzinski as the norm to best help the club's sponsor retention rate, which the FCKC general

manager touts as being very high two years into the club's existence. Budzinski also touted a belief that sports fanbases support sponsors strongly and that the club does everything in its power to support "activation" or synergy between sponsors and the club itself, its players, and fans, a policy which he notes has led to happy sponsors through the first two years of the club's existence (personal communication, July 24, 2014).

Lahue spoke of the process of trying to woo sponsors, not just to get them to sign agreements with clubs but to also sign coveted multiple year deals to sponsor the team. The Chicago Red Stars general manager argued vehemently that much of the battle was just getting prospective targets to come to a game. Lahue claims that prospective sponsors (and fans) are usually impressed upon coming to the game, praising the atmosphere and the quality of play on the field. She provided C.J. Wilson Mazda, the club's 2014 shirt sponsor, as a prime example of this, with the company being "blown away" after seeing the club's first game of the season (personal communication, July 31, 2014).

Wood and Lahue noted that sponsors didn't just get exposure through promotion in marketing materials for their dollars but also a chance to sell or give away samples of their products at games, a very tantalizing way for brands to expand their exposure to new markets. At other times, sponsors would offer soccer themed products for free, of course, with their name and logo plastered on the free items. Budzinski claimed that his organization preached interactivity and collaboration with sponsors in an effort to come up with promotions that would help both sponsor and organization.

Gooley spoke of some of the marketing activities accomplished with the help of national sponsors of the league, specifically the Army National Guard. According to the Sky Blue FC director of sales, the club put on a full court press in presenting a "military night", with a colour

guard presenting the flags and a real military humvee vehicle that was explorable for young kids among other perks (personal communication, August 13, 2014). Gooley also revealed that this “sponsor activation” went beyond match days, as the National Guard had a large presence at some of the club’s camps and clinics (personal communication, August 13, 2014). While the club does benefit from sponsor dollars, the National Guard also benefits as well, with the organization able to pitch itself as a part of the future of girls and boys.

Wood believed that some sponsors were attracted to NWSL clubs, because of the wide cross-section of America that came to games, citing specifically a healthcare sponsor, claiming it was appealing as “they know that at games you're gonna get kids as young as five or six and their families and people up into their seventies and eighties, seeing their product, and everyone needs health care” (personal communication, July 23, 2014). Lahue also echoed this belief, and noted that some potential sponsors were even offered up a chance to come to games and set up booths before signing a formal sponsorship agreement, because “we want them to experience what it's like at our games and also, that's the best way for them to understand our demographic and see how it fits with their marketing initiatives for next year” (personal communication, July 31, 2014).

Secondary services. Besides promotional opportunities for sponsors, match days provide opportunities for NWSL clubs to generate secondary revenue through products and services other than ticket revenue. Wood mentioned booths akin to those found at other professional sports events where for a ticket priced at a nominal fee, spectators can try out their soccer skills, such as shooting soccer balls at targets or a goal. Some of these booths may even offer prizes or team memorabilia, making them attractive to young boys and girls, while Budzinski noted that such a game at FC Kansas City could see adults win a lease on a car. At the same time,

Budzinski also noted the importance of protecting the brand in the face of these sponsorship/promotion synergy efforts, not wanting to engage in a promotion that would be viewed as “cheap” by the fanbase (personal communication, July 24, 2014).

Additionally, the clubs may sell ancillary services in addition to the match. Wood noted that Boston offered special birthday parties, where groups got to hold a party in a designated section outside the stadium, with player visits included as part of the deal. Considering how many young girls and boys look up to players as role models, this is also very appealing for one of the club’s main target markets.

Ancillary services also extended beyond just gameday experiences according to many of the interviewed officials. Wood of Boston and Lahue of Chicago both mentioned vibrant camp and clinic businesses, while Jim Gooley of Sky Blue FC also made mention of an academy business with clinics, camps, and even players working as trainers in the region during the offseason to keep them “in market” (personal communication, August 13, 2014).

The stadium question. Venue selection brought both challenges and opportunities for NWSL clubs. Most clubs were not eager to repeat the mistakes of clubs like Chicago, who were driven into insolvency by exorbitant rent being paid to rent Major League Soccer facilities, even with their desirable amenities. Forced to be more pragmatic with their venue selection, NWSL clubs suddenly found themselves making trade-offs as far as amenities and other particulars were concerned for their stadiums. According to Wood, Boston found out that having copious parking at Harvard helped avoid the crush of cars that had plagued their last venue, but that fans were now unhappy with having to pay for a parking fee not included on tickets, where spaces had been limited but free the previous year at the previous venue.

The issue of control was a prominent topic of discussion in regards to venues when speaking with club officials. Mike Golub of the Thorns noted that with Providence Park:

we control our arena, we control our stadium, we operate our stadium. We have complete control over the schedule, and we have complete control over the experience. We have complete control over the revenue streams (personal communication, July 30, 2014).

This “top-to-bottom” control is an invaluable asset for the Thorns (Golub, personal communication, July 30, 2014). They do not have to worry about secondary events at their venue. They do not have to wrangle with other entities over a stadium lease. They do not have to offer up cuts of concessions and other activities to a third-party. For a club in a smaller professional league like the NWSL, this freedom could well be the difference between viability and anxious struggle.

By contrast, Jim Gooley of Sky Blue FC noted the lack of control his club had over its venue, Yurcak Field. The venue is rented from Rutgers University, in an arrangement that has caused no end of problems for the club despite the advantages of playing on a grass field with no lines and ample seating. Besides the rent being paid to the university, Gooley notes that the club gets none of the concession sales at Sky Blue FC matches, with the club’s director of sales bemoaning not even getting a percentage of those sales, noting how much money is brought in from food and beverage throughout the course of a single game.

The issue of concessions and the revenue from their sale also proved to be a thorny issue for many clubs. Numerous clubs, including FC Kansas City and Sky Blue FC, indicated their inability to sell alcohol at their games has proven burdensome in both attracting older fans, who enjoy having a few drinks at games, as well as in bringing in extra revenue from the sale of

alcohol. Chicago noted that the ability to sell alcohol at their current venue in Bridgeview was a major boon considering most of the other colleges in the area don't allow for alcohol sales.

Lahue claimed that being able to purchase alcohol was:

a draw for some people, to go out to a soccer game on a Summer night and enjoy a few beers with their friends, especially for trying to swing some of that twenty-something demographic, plenty of dads bringing their daughters out want to enjoy a beer on the night (personal communication, July 31, 2014).

In essence, the ability to offer alcohol to fans was a big help in the club's efforts to broaden their demographic reach beyond just the youth market.

Gooley spoke of the limitations on alcohol sales for Sky Blue FC at their current venue at Rutgers University. Technically, the club can sell alcohol, but on certain terms. Gooley elaborated:

the deal that we would get from Rutgers is that we have only one approved distributor, a Rutgers approved distributor to actually bring the beer in, and the buy-in is so high, we have to provide that person, that company too much money to be...to purchase a license for the games. And, when we reach the break-even point where we could have possibly made that money back, we still don't make money on the beer (personal communication, August 13, 2014).

Such economics have been impossible for the club to live with, leading to a lack of alcohol sales and the absence of another perk for older attendees.

Promotions. The use of game day promotions to attract fans was a divisive subject amongst the marketing officials interviewed. Close to the only universal promotion embraced by the clubs is the annual Project Pink night (or similar variants), which promotes breast cancer

awareness, usually notably with the home team wearing pink kits, which may later be auctioned off for charity. Wood noted that Boston were very limited with their overall promotions, with one of the few that he could recall being an Easter promotion that included such lures as an Easter egg hunt that clearly appealed to young families and the youth market.

Lahue noted that Chicago was one of the most ardent proponents of game-by-game promotions. The Red Stars general manager touted the use of such promotions as a way to attract an audience of spectators that may have not sampled the product live before. Lahue claimed that the theme nights allowed the club, “to be able to really communicate with organizations in a very specific way instead of just kind of an open general way,” that helped the club communicate with different groups (personal communication, July 31, 2014). While the club got a late start on such promotions in 2014, the success with them was such that they are aiming to hammer out a promotion schedule well in advance of the 2015 season to allow for ample time to promote the themes and get the word out beforehand.

Gooley claimed that Sky Blue FC looked at minor league baseball as a model when developing game-to-game promotions, noting the importance of these nights to the bottom line for these baseball clubs. Gooley noted that for these clubs, most, or all, of the staff was dedicated to making sure these events went off well. While Gooley claimed they had used minor league baseball’s theme nights as their model, he also spoke of how far Sky Blue FC has to go to meet their goals for these promotions. He emphasized how youth clubs each have their own night, with accompanying perks and how such promotions were advertised through youth soccer organizations and their different media channels, with discounted tickets for group sales. However, a larger variety of theme nights is still something Gooley claimed he was striving for in future seasons.

However, Portland took an almost polar opposite approach to the issue of game day promotions. Golub argued ardently that his organization did not actively engage in many “giveaways and things” to try and attract fans (personal communication, July 30, 2014). He argued that he felt that the organization did not to make use of such promotions to draw fans to the stadium. On its face, Golub’s argument seems solid, with the Portland Thorns leading the league in attendance by a wide margin for both of the years of the NWSL’s existence. However, such an attitude towards promotions may not be practical for clubs with lower attendances.

Merchandising. Most of the interviewed marketing officials also indicated a rather complicated relationship regarding their clubs and merchandising. While Major League Soccer affiliated NWSL clubs in Portland and Houston would seem to have a clear merchandising advantage, conflicts in apparel sponsors between MLS and NWSL have made things difficult on clubs. With adidas a primary sponsor of Major League Soccer and its clubs and Nike being the main provider of apparel for the NWSL, Portland and Houston have had to create separate brands for their women’s clubs while operating an entirely different merchandise line for the men and women’s clubs. Mike Golub of the Portland Thorns pointed out the extent of this divide, noting that the organization had “in the stadium an adidas Timbers team store and separately, separate locations a Nike Thorns team store” (personal communication, July 30, 2014).

Ryan Wood of the Boston Breakers noted that demand has often outstripped supply, to the frustration of teams. Wood also noted that some clubs such as the Breakers outsourced to companies such as Foxboro based We Got Soccer for much of their team merchandise. Wood noted initially that the club did not even have jerseys on sale initially at their stadium, fearing a lack of demand at the beginning that would’ve seen the club take a financial hit, instead opting to

just sell the Breakers jerseys at We Got Soccer stores. It mirrored previous seasons, where the club did not sell merchandise at the stadium. Wood also pointed out that his club has always had a difficult time selling through the internet before 2014, also going through We Got Soccer's online offering and offering limited quantities of merchandise on their on site but still struggling with demand overall.

Wood and Lahue note that merchandising strategies for each NWSL club evolved in the second year of the league with the further involvement of Nike, a major corporate backer of the league, in matters of merchandising. While the rushed nature of the first season of the NWSL led to rudimentary plans, Nike was decidedly more aggressive in their marketing approach in the second year of the league. Gooley claimed that Nike provided uniforms, training gear, and a set number of dollars to spend on retail products that clubs can in turn sell to the public.

Wood and Lahue spoke about Nike supplying each club with booth-like 'retail merchandising units' to be displayed at games near entry gates at which to sell merchandise from, also noting that the new Nike booths have been a big success, citing the placement of the booths as being very attractive to arriving fans. The units have rolling displays with countertops and ample space to hang merchandise from and have been a bit hit with clubs and fans alike.

Additionally, Wood claimed that Nike helped with presenting a more robust online merchandising platform for the league, offering up a larger and more stable selection of products available for sale. Gooley emphasized how important having an online merchandise store was considering the rise of online buying. Lahue went as far as to say that clubs could order almost anything from the Nike catalog, put a team logo on it, and have it available for sale. Such staples in other leagues like draft day t-shirts and training jerseys have been slowly added to the product lineup. Wood and Budzinski note that clubs have their pick of the Nike catalog when deciding on

merchandise to order, though considering demand is obviously paramount when making decisions to try and maximize the revenue coming in with merchandise being sold, but it's highly unlikely the selection of merchandise has ever been better considering Nike's limitless options from shirts, shorts, and everything in between to choose from.

Gooley did note that if, for some reason, the club wanted merchandise that Nike did not offer, like, for example, heating and cooling packs, the club could work with a third party to develop, market, and sell such an item. Gooley identified this as an important part of constantly expanding the club's brand. While he indicated that he was pleased with Nike's offerings, Gooley also explained that his club was always looking to go beyond their offerings to increase their merchandising options and revenue streams from those options.

At the same time however, Wood pointed out that online demand still overwhelmed Nike at the beginning of the 2014 season, to the point that there were shipping delays for products to the tune of fans getting their merchandise weeks later than they should have. Despite the increase in online options, Wood still noted that, at the time, the club still didn't have scarves or hats, absences that Wood felt were a misstep, claiming that "You could make Boston Breakers' napkins and people would buy them" (personal communication, July 23, 2014). At the same time though, Wood indicated a wariness of plunging dollars into merchandise with the fear of not recouping what was spent when finances were tight as is.

Discussion/Conclusion

This research examined the effect that feminist themes had on the general marketing activities of the clubs of the National Women's Soccer League (NWSL). These case study interviews have shown that feminist themes within sport are playing key roles in how clubs

market themselves and the league in general and that understanding this relationship may be key in finally making a professional women's soccer league last for an extended period of time.

With the failures of the first two professional women's soccer leagues in the United States due to inefficient and ineffective marketing, developing and maintaining a cohesive marketing plan is crucial for both clubs and the NWSL as a whole. This study of the effects of feminist themes on the general marketing practices of NWSL clubs expands the sport management literature by explaining how feminist themes have affected: the pursuit of certain target markets as customers, recruitment of and interaction with the media, and the cultivation and maintenance of multiple revenue streams.

Through this research, clear battle lines were drawn in NWSL clubs' approach to attracting certain segments of the population. While studies (e.g. Christopherson et al., 2002; Jowdy & McDonald, 2003) have found that previous leagues have relied heavily on selling to youth and families, the acknowledgement that appeals to a more adult, mature audience are necessary seem to have taken hold, especially with Major League Soccer supported clubs already bringing an adult fanbase to the fore. Even clubs like Chicago, not officially part of an MLS organization, have partnered with their city's MLS club to try and draw in adult fans.

However, the interviewed officials also noted that attracting families and youth clubs was still a high priority, as bulk sales still play a large role in balancing the books with large chunks of income coming into the club. The ability to tout the product as wholesome entertainment remains a major drawing card for youth and families, akin to how previous women's sport has been marketed (Christopherson et al., 2002; Longman, 2001). At the same time though, clubs have begun to try and counter some of the homophobia reported in previous studies on women's sport and women's soccer in particular (Caudwell, 1999; Knoppers & Anthonissen, 2003). While

officials did indicate a balancing act in not offending other ‘conservative’ fans, they also noted that the time of ignoring their LGBT audience had passed.

Another prominent marketing debate has centered on how teams should be marketed to potential customers, emphasizing the team or just certain star players. The former has been a major emphasis of marketing for the USWNT, with stars, even of the calibre of Mia Hamm, preferring to shy away from the spotlight (Longman, 2001). During the USWNT's heyday, it was far more common to see the team promoting such concepts as unity, modesty, and selflessness, themes common to the marketing of women's sport, instead of overt star power (Christopherson et al., 2002; Martinez, 2008). Many of the interviewed teams took differing positions on how to market their clubs. Some stridently opposed putting a strong emphasis on just USWNT players and wanted promotion of team vs team as the main emphasis, showing the team as a unified front. Others felt that star power sold, and that players with compelling stories or matchups between big stars could be sold more easily to the media in an effort to attract attention.

Getting that attention has been another major frustration for many NWSL clubs. As has been the case in many other women's sports, a lack of equality in the breadth and depth of coverage has plagued women's soccer (Messner, 2002). All interviewees spoke about the problems associated with the league's lack of a national television deal that ran for more than the playoffs and last handful of weeks of the season. While it was clear that officials appreciated local television deals and the league's YouTube streaming platform, they also bemoaned how the lack of the national TV deal limited reach towards viewers and inhibited sponsorship efforts. In this respect, the NWSL has continued the backward trend of television coverage for women's soccer leagues in the United States, going from a full season deal on major networks at the beginning of the WUSA to the current partial season deal (Grainey, 2012). Such a reality is

especially worrying considering the exponential growth of sport channels in the past decade and a half, with the NWSL still unable to find a consistent home for coverage.

Print media coverage was a subject that drew diverging responses, with some in smaller markets expressing appreciation and happiness with local coverage, including beat writers. Interviews and document analysis revealed that coverage, both in print and through electronic media, tried to capture more of the actual sporting narrative within the league and its clubs, diverging from past research which has found a reliance on tropes such as 'motherhood' that appeal to middle class American sensibilities (Christopherson et al., 2002; Festle, 1996). However, some of the bigger market clubs like Boston and Chicago rued how hard it was to get attention from print media sources that had been burned one time too many by failing leagues. This speaks to prior studies (e.g., Duncan & Messner, 1996; Messner, 2002) which have noted the disparity in coverage between men's and women's sport.

Part of the response to the difficulties in attracting traditional media has been the surge in the use of new media and social media to close the gap in coverage between men's sport and women's sport. Women's sport has benefitted greatly from the boom in internet coverage of sport, with niche communities sprouting up to obsessively cover details in women sport previously left untouched. All the interviewees praised social media as a tool with which clubs could disseminate information with in a timely manner as well as being able to collect feedback and start a dialogue with fans as well. YouTube has also been an invaluable partner for the league, with clubs being able to stream games for consumption for fans around the globe. However, many officials also spoke of wanting to present a more professional product with stronger production standards after some snafus over the first few seasons, glitches that aren't readily apparent in television production. The presence of these technical issues indicates that the

resource gap Messner (2002) speaks about in the media still exists, though the rapid growth of internet coverage does indicate the value of such an avenue for fledgling leagues.

The lack of a big money media rights contract has forced clubs to be largely dependent on secondary revenue streams besides gate money to keep afloat. Sponsorship, an area which previous leagues struggled with in large part according to prior studies (e.g., Graine, 2012; Jowdy & McDonald, 2003; Longman, 2003), has remained a vital focus for NWSL clubs. Many of the interviewed clubs stated that the perceived target markets of NWSL clubs was appealing to some sponsors, with many corporations aiming to pitch their product to middle and upper-class families with a great degree of disposable income. Such a target market may prove tantalizing to some companies, but interviewed officials also noted that it was hardly a universal opinion. Some prospective sponsors have balked at signing deals due to what they perceive as limited reach in terms of demographics from the clubs of the league. This perceived overreach by the league towards 'family' markets dogged the WUSA, and it's been an image subsequent leagues have been looking to alter (Longman, 2003). While putting on a "family-friendly" product, as many other women's sports have done, may help suck in some spectators and sponsors, it may also ultimately drive others away, creating a balancing act for clubs.

Previous studies (e.g., Caudwell, 2011; Christopherson et al., 2002; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Farrell et al., 2011; Messner, 2002) have found a distinct lack of equality in resources and funding for almost all women's sport, with NWSL teams ardently targeting multiple revenue streams to try and close the gap. Clubs provide many ancillary services besides just a game to watch, as the interviewed officials noted other services targeted directly towards the family and youth market such as soccer skill challenges and birthday party hangouts, which

the latter making use of players' status as role models and heroines to attract business from youth.

By developing trust and a relationship with the community, clubs are also able to run youth academies and camps to also provide revenue for the organization. In a sense, the 'middle class appeal' spoken about by those like Martinez (2008) helps clubs fulfil financial goals and survive fiscally. However, less within the control of most clubs was many aspects of the venues the club played at, with parking and concessions proving especially troublesome to some clubs. Whereas male sport clubs often get sweetheart leases or own stadiums outright, many NWSL clubs have been nomadic or must prioritize amenities based on budgetary concerns and pragmatism.

Managerial Implications

Successful marketing can make or break sport clubs and leagues, especially those with such a minute margin of error, as is the case with a league as young and formative as the NWSL. It is apparent after speaking with marketing officials with NWSL clubs that feminist themes have had a major impact on general marketing practices of the organizations, with some themes like the inequality of resources creating great challenges that need creative solutions, while others, like the tendency to present female athletes as role models, have pushed marketing in certain directions. Navigating these challenges and using feminist themes to their advantage may be key for the survival of the NWSL and its clubs in the long-term.

After the failures of past leagues to resonate with non-family, adult audiences, all interviewed participants recognize the importance of drawing in more of this market. Clubs with ties to Major League Soccer clubs, be they directly run by parent MLS clubs or with access to some marketing databases or partnership opportunities seem to have a better chance of

resonating with these markets, making cultivating these relationships crucial for current and future NWSL clubs. At the same time however, clubs also recognized the importance of continuing to bring in youth audiences and families, groups that have turned out for the product in the past, thanks to the allure of kids seeing potential role models. Such groups are most likely to purchase tickets in bulk, providing crucial chunks of revenue for clubs and may also be avid purchasers of ancillary services like meet and greets and birthday party appearances. Balance between adult and family/youth markets was stressed however, as sinking too far in one direction could alienate some potential sponsors.

Clubs also need to be mindful of how they market themselves in terms of whether to tout their biggest stars or focus more on the brand of the team itself. Part of the USWNT's success has been pushing the brand itself over singular players, even in the days of Mia Hamm. This approach plays into how women's sport has been pushed in the past, with attitudes of selflessness and modesty appealing to families who may see players as role models. However, clubs in the NWSL have been desperate in many cases to hoard as many USWNT players as possible, as those are the players casual fans are most familiar with. Such players have also proven to be more sellable to the media and sponsors, who appreciate a good narrative that those players can provide. It's highly likely that a combination of the two approaches, between promoting the brand and the stars, will best suit clubs going forward.

Given the frustration with the lack of coverage from the media and some of the dealings with them thus far, NWSL clubs may need to engage in a part-grunt work, part-charm offensive campaign to draw attention and coverage to their product. Some clubs spoke of repeatedly engaging local media to try and rekindle interest after past failures of women's soccer leagues, with some of the smaller markets seemingly having better luck with getting media coverage. In

the end, it may come down to having to spend a little money to woo media with events featuring perks like free food and access to players and coaches. Such events have proven successful overseas and could be a great way to introduce the product to new media faces.

It is also clear that the utilization of new media and social media will be crucial for the growth of women's sport and the NWSL in particular. Interviewees spoke of improving standards for games streamed on YouTube to improve perception of the league as more than simply a minor-league affair. Until the league gets a consistent television deal, such standards are crucial to foster positive impressions for fans and potential sponsors and investors. The use of social media for information dissemination and feedback also will be vital going forward. Club officials noted social media's ability to both inform organizations as to how they're doing, as well as its ability to help build devoted fan communities to support the league and clubs.

Cultivating secondary sources of income is also make or break for many clubs, with sponsorship at the heart of many clubs' quest for long-term viability. New clubs may want to utilize every pre-existing relationship if possible based on responses in this study, while putting together a high volume cache of sponsors was also touted as key. Interviewees also preached the importance of flexibility to give potential sponsors as many options as possible when trying to decide on a level of commitment. Many of the interviewees also preached the importance of getting potential sponsors acquainted with the gameday experience, and that luring sponsors to the stadium on gameday be it through VIP tours or offering the chance to setup product booths free of charge for a game could be key ways to earn trust from sponsors.

The notion of total control over a club's venue also was a very important sticking point for clubs, with Portland touting the virtues of controlling their venue and avoiding toxic leases and having to pay out for concessions sold or having to deal with poor parking arrangements.

While total control over a stadium is a pipe dream for most clubs unaffiliated with MLS teams, at the very least, clubs may want to avoid Sky Blue FC's situation at Yurcak Field, where the club receives no concession sales and finds it logistically impossible to sell alcohol at the stadium. Merchandising also appears to be a crucial revenue stream, with clubs gladly partnering with Nike for their efforts. The depth of what is offered has been a sticking point for some, with those like Sky Blue FC experimenting with products to help buyers "do" heteronormative femininity. Given the tentative success of such efforts, other clubs may want to think about further diversifying their product lines when possible.

Future Directions

Studying the effects on the general marketing practices of professional women's soccer through the use of feminist themes in marketing has helped bring to light some of the inner workings of the marketing of women's soccer, a subject sorely lacking in enquiry despite the success of the USWNT and the existence of three leagues over the past two decades. While this study has been informative, it is also meant as only a starting point, with further research necessary to further illuminate issues and keep pace with a rapidly evolving part of the sport industry. Gaps in the literature still exist, as well as an absence of research into certain angles of women's soccer marketing and how it has been affected by feminist themes.

While this study has taken a look at marketing decisions through the eyes of officials, the effects of those decisions still remain unexamined. This study brought to light many of the marketing initiatives and outreaches towards the media that clubs have made, but their efficacy remains uncertain. Communication with media sources could gauge how effectively clubs have been in trying to establish relationships, while conducting research into the clubs' new media channels through fans could also gauge how effective clubs have been in exploiting that market.

More in-depth research with fans of clubs could be used to establish whether the target markets clubs are going after are responding or if clubs need to tweak their strategies in reaching these markets. Additionally, surveys at matches themselves could establish whether the club is doing a good job in best leveraging secondary revenue streams like merchandising and acceptable venue quality.

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CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

The overall purpose of this dissertation project was to examine the intersection of feminist themes, marketing, and women's soccer in the United States, both historically and within the National Women's Soccer League (NWSL). There were three specific objectives of this project. First, an extensive literature review of the marketing of women's soccer in the United States was conducted to piece together a coherent narrative as previous examinations have been fractured and spread piecemeal over various anecdotal sources. Such a review also allowed the researcher to compare and contrast past marketing themes with the ones currently being put in place by the NWSL. Second, the use of feminist themes in the marketing of professional women's soccer was examined and compared in five NWSL club case settings. Lastly, feminist themes' effect on the general marketing practices of NWSL clubs was analyzed through the five NWSL club case settings. Findings from these research objectives add to a lacking branch of sport management literature involving feminist themes and women's soccer marketing, while also providing policy recommendations for NWSL clubs and the league itself.

This doctoral dissertation was completed using an article-based format. Three articles were completed to fulfill the purpose of this project. Article one (Chapter 4) tackles the first research objective, article two (Chapter 5) tackles the second objective, and article three (Chapter 6) completes the third objective.

This chapter unfolds as follows. First, the theoretical contributions of the three articles, as well as the study as a whole, is examined. Next, the practical contributions of the three articles are reviewed, along with policy recommendations for stakeholders. Finally, the dissertation is concluded with limitations of this study, as well as possibilities for future research to build on this study.

Theoretical Contributions

This study sought to fill some of the notable gaps within sport and feminist literature in terms of studies concerning professional women's soccer marketing in the United States, specifically the marketing of said clubs and leagues through feminist themes. This study established a framework of three key feminist tenets that have historically been at the center of professional women's soccer marketing issues and currently fuel debates as to how to best market the sport: a) an inequity of rules, resources, and coverage compared to men's professional sports, b) a practice of embracing qualities such as motherhood, family values, and role model traits while shunning the 'other', groups outside of these norms, including the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) community, and c) the adulation of the picture of ideal heteronormative femininity and the construction of a consumption community through that ideal image.

The history of women's soccer marketing in the United States. With this framework, the researcher looked at how professional women's soccer in the United States was marketed in the past around these tenets, providing a systematically organized examination of the historical evolution of the marketing of women's soccer in the United States, both in theory and in practice, which until this point, had largely been confined to books and media articles. The examination of marketing of women's soccer in the United States for the time period up to the

1999 Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) Women's World Cup was only done in retrospect and in anecdotal fashion, mostly in books (e.g. Grainey, 2012; Lisi, 2013; Longman, 2001).

Interest picked up at and after the 1999 FIFA Women's World Cup that saw the USWNT triumph and draw attention worldwide, but, again, most of the introspection was done through the media via anecdotes and not through research itself. What research there was generally focused on mass media presentation of the tournament and less the marketing of the event, which was mainly examined by books and media articles (e.g. Christopherson, Janning, & McConnell, 2002). Even as the USWNT has grown in popularity again, research into marketing of the team has been scant.

Feminist themes in NWSL club marketing. Previous studies have largely been restricted to examinations of women's soccer through feminist themes outside the United States (e.g. Caudwell, 1999; Cox & Thompson, 2004; Knoppers & Anthonissen, 2004; Williams, 2004) or limited to the USWNT (Christopherson et al., 2002), largely ignoring the three professional women's club leagues that have formed since the 1999 FIFA Women's World Cup. One of the few studies focusing on a professional women's club league (Jowdy and McDonald, 2003) focused on marketing from a pure business sense, while overlooking the impact of feminist themes within the marketing of the clubs and the league.

Additionally, while there was a rapid bloom of studies into women's soccer sociologically and in feminist terms right after the landmark 1999 FIFA Women's World Cup, such studies have largely been absent for the past decade. This study focuses on the marketing of women's soccer through feminist themes within clubs of the current professional women's soccer league, the NWSL. The current timeframe and study of the active league is important, as

the NWSL has operational details specific to it, such as being subsidized in part by U.S. Soccer and having the support of some Major League Soccer franchises, both aspects which were not true of prior leagues. Previous findings have largely become out of date given the new structure of the NWSL and its clubs as compared to older leagues.

Previous studies (e.g. Bryson, 1987) found that the masculine hegemony dominating sport had perpetuated negative archetypes of women's physical capacities in comparison men when it comes to sport. However, this study found that the league and its clubs were very motivated towards further shattering these negative stigmas surrounding women's sport. Much was noted in terms of the touting of players' athleticism in the marketing of teams. It is also noteworthy that this marketing was not just directed towards women and young girls but to young boys at coaching clinics and camps. At these events, players aim to show all audiences that their athleticism is not to be taken for granted.

These events have also allowed players and clubs to appeal to a sense of 'idol worship' felt by many of these young players. As Sugden (1994) noted, women's soccer has almost always held an appeal to the white middle class that has lifted players onto a pedestal as role models that represent everything 'good' about sport and society. This study found that, for their part, clubs have mostly unabashedly been willing to proudly tout these virtues and fully integrate it into their brand identity in an attempt to procure long-term loyalty and to have a trump card to show to potential sponsors interested in a demographic that has shown itself to be flush with income.

The battle against homophobia has proven to be a long one, with it being used as a political weapon to box women into boundaries of permissible female behavior (Griffin, 2002; Pharr, 1988). This study however showed that clubs' attitudes towards the LGBT community has

come along by leaps and bounds since the days where players were blacklisted from endorsement deals due to their sexuality (Longman, 2001). Far from being erased as argued before by Kane and Lenskyj (1996), some of the most popular athletes in professional women's soccer are openly gay with little semblance of a backlash noticeable. Clubs have openly marketed towards LGBT communities and have found loyal and vocal supporters for their teams, though the league itself has still lingered on the fence in such promotion.

This study also found that attitudes towards revealing pictorials have also changed since the days where female athletes posing for such photos were roundly criticized by many in the media (Grainey, 2012; Longman, 2001). Opinions by interviewees on such pictorials ranged from neutral ambivalence to tacit approval, with marketing officials noting that such opportunities allowed players to market themselves in a sport where such opportunities have been painfully limited in the past. Some interviewees also felt that such pictorials could also bring newfound attention to their team and to the sport, which they believed was desirable and not the 'wrong' kind of attention as has been argued in the past.

An interesting sidenote to this study can be traced back to the notion of sport being ruled over by a class of males resistant to change, with Messner (2002) among others claiming power brokers have maintained male hegemony. While all involved in the NWSL have actively fought to close gaps in funding and coverage, Messner also noted difference in opportunity within sport. Under the surface, this can be found within the league and its teams, as despite being a league for women players, eight of the nine head coaches are men, the vast majority of ownership groups within the league are dominated by men, and of the five marketing officials the researcher interviewed, four were men. Tellingly, perhaps, the league also recently replaced its first commissioner Cheryl Bailey, a woman, with a man, Jeff Plush. While equality inevitably means

the best candidate for the job being chosen regardless of gender, the stark difference in the amount of men and women in positions of power in the NWSL cannot be ignored.

The impact of feminist themes on marketing sectors of NWSL clubs. As stated above, studies into feminist themes and the marketing of women's soccer has been scant. Almost all of the previous studies have dealt exclusively with the USWNT while ignoring the fledgling professional women's soccer leagues that have come and gone. Besides the lack of research into the relationship between marketing and feminism in the leagues, there has been an overall dearth of research into marketing on the whole within professional women's soccer leagues. The past few years has seen a significant shift in the way business is done in regards to women's soccer in the United States, cutting to the core of basic marketing principles. This research supplements existing sport management literature by bringing into focus some of the changes in general marketing principles through the NWSL and how those changes have been impacted by feminist themes.

Specifically, the researcher conducted interviews with team marketing officials, examining current marketing practices and strategies built around constructing additional revenue streams, interacting with the media, and engaging with target markets. While previous studies have looked at these impacts in general in sport settings, they have seldom examined them through a feminist lens as far as application to professional women's soccer in the United States. Examining these connections within the clubs of the NWSL should allow for a valuable bridge to allow future work involving feminist themes and general marketing principles within professional women's sport.

This study provided further examples of the theory argued by Butler (1990) about gender being a social construct and further elaborated by Goldman (1992), who claimed that

corporations have blatantly crafted a message that their products can help purchasers ascribe to desirable gender norms. Interviewed marketing officials in this study noted that they were always interested in producing more ‘feminized’ merchandise that, in effect, allows purchasers to both support ‘their’ team while ‘doing’ heteronormative femininity. However, given the steel-eyed focus on the bottom line of selling products, this may be less about pandering towards any message of desirable heteronormative femininity and more about gathering as much revenue as possible from merchandise. Had there not been demand for these ‘feminized’ products, the teams likely would not be interested in producing them. In this case, it may be strictly business interests trumping any kind of social movement.

Additionally this study provided further example of the marginalization of women’s sport by the media that has been found by other authors (e.g. Christopherson, Janning, & McConnell, 2002; Duncan & Messner, 1996; Messner, 2002). While some of the smaller market clubs were happy with their coverage from the traditional print media, many of the bigger market clubs identified the struggle to get consistent coverage despite constant efforts to attract attention. Almost all of the interviewed officials noted the difficulties the league had in attracting attention due to the lack of a stable television deal, a position that has gotten worse as leagues have come and gone. Festle’s (1996) findings that the coverage of women’s sport in the media often loses the narrative built around men’s sport can also be echoed within this study, which found that the league has struggled to construct these narratives, while teams have fared little better.

Practical Contributions/Policy Recommendations

Viability has been the longstanding aim through three leagues, two failed and one nascent, of professional women’s soccer in the United States. While the pursuit of a ‘magic bullet’ that will suddenly turn the sport into a profitable and sustainable enterprise in the U.S. has

consumed many a sportsman and businessman, this study reveals a maddening process of trial and error, of high-profile failures and meltdowns and small scale successes and victories that have left the custodians of the sport weary but wiser. Far from being a homogenous league as the WUSA and WPS largely were, the NWSL is instead composed of a variety of entities, from small markets to big, from MLS supported franchises to well experienced franchises that have operated through all of the professional women's soccer leagues that have existed.

This wide range of philosophies and styles has made things chaotic and fractured at times through two seasons but has also inoculated the league from one overarching strategy that could drag the league down if it fails. Instead, the broad composition of ideas and philosophies has let the league's members learn from each other and forge a relationship that has benefitted all through two seasons. It's no accident that of the three leagues, the NWSL has had the most diverse set of clubs and is the one with the rosiest outlook after two complete seasons have been played.

The history of women's soccer marketing in the United States. Those wishing to take the time and money to invest in a professional women's soccer league and/or club have had no shortage in difficulties in finding a roadmap towards how to best create a product that will be suitable for consumption in today's sporting landscape, often being forced to dig through scores of anecdotal evidence and/or communicate with current or past stakeholders whose views may be tempered and subjective. In this respect, this dissertation serves as a collection of the most pertinent anecdotal evidence and research findings that creates as close to a complete narrative as has been constructed for the marketing of women's soccer in the United States to this point.

Timing is truly everything in sport and business, and the USWNT took full advantage of their one chance to make a huge impression in advance of the 1999 FIFA Women's World Cup.

Players promoted the event and the team like their livelihoods depended on it, with no shortage of personal appearances, clinics, and promotional events in an effort to get the word out about the event. While the players and event managers were still bolstered by funding that professional women's clubs are unlikely to approach soon, the fervor the players attacked the marketing with needs to be replicated for success at this level. The work by the USWNT also set in motion a long and mostly successful tradition of direct engagement with youth audiences and families that continues to this day as leagues and clubs try to resonate with a fickle audience. It is also worth noting that the USWNT and 1999 FIFA Women's World Cup organizers didn't just appeal to a singular market. Besides youth audiences and 'soccer moms', the organizations aimed at hooking 'soccer dads' who had experience buying tickets for sporting events. Such a lesson has only been followed sporadically by previous professional leagues but appears to be crucial to success given how well it worked for the 1999 FIFA Women's World Cup organizers and the USWNT.

While the overall lesson learned from the failure of WUSA may be 'don't spend all of your capital in year one', larger lessons came to the fore after an in-depth examination and collection of anecdotal data. The league's fall from grace from a major television contract in season one to being shunted to largely anonymous networks afterward highlights the need for reputable national television deals to both bring advertising revenue in as well as keep the league in the public's eye. Additionally, the WUSA's overt focus on drawing families and youth soccer players served as a turn-off for older audiences, who didn't feel welcome, a major problem once fickle younger audiences turned on the league, declaring it 'uncool'. Such a skewed marketing focus also made the league seem less like a business venture and more like a charity venture for corporate sponsors, giving them an easy excuse to cut their funding as they looked to trim expenses. While few would argue abandoning the youth and family market is a sound strategy,

the failures of the WUSA indicate that a balanced approach between that market and an adult market may be wise.

WPS seemingly failed to heed the above advice, overtly targeting a youth and family audience while only making marginal outreaches to a maturing adult soccer audience that was falling more in love with the game as exposure increased. While the men's game grew through an increased multimedia presence that offered up more viewing options for leagues around the world and a growing analytics movement that spurred discussion in online communities, WPS lagged behind in both departments. The league suffered through a parasitic TV deal with Fox Soccer Channel that saw the network take a large chunk of advertising revenue for a TV package that included one game a week in the dead of Sunday afternoon with a painfully grainy broadcast and lackluster production values. The league's website offered up only bare bones information and analysis, while a burgeoning social media movement was one of the first things to go when cutbacks were deemed necessary. The last straw was the involvement of Dan Borislow in running a once storied franchise, which only robbed the league of more valuable credibility in the eyes of a weary public.

From the failure of WPS came some invaluable lessons. A suitable television deal is a must, with professional production values, a consistent schedule, and more than just a token game of the week. Major sport leagues now have almost all of their games televised, along with a robust internet package to fill in the gaps, and anything less than a movement towards that standard is painfully short-sighted. Additionally, the internet and social media has become a crucial prong in every sport league and club's marketing plan. Such ventures are a way of keeping fans informed and entertained, while bringing together supporters from across the globe. Used properly, the internet and social media can be an equalizer for leagues looking to gain

attention and bolster their reputation in the battle for viability in the sport and entertainment industry.

Feminist themes in NWSL club marketing. The interviewed marketing officials were each able to share pieces of their experiences with their respective clubs that may prove invaluable both for existing clubs trying to improve their marketing, as well as new ownership groups that may be seeking to start an NWSL franchise. On the whole, the interviewed marketing officials indicated that when they were able to incorporate modern feminist themes into their marketing efforts for their respective clubs, positive results usually followed.

Equal coverage from the media and anything approaching equal resources financially and non-financially usually produced tangible results for teams, showing that the struggle to close the gaps with men's professional teams is a worthwhile one. In this respect, partnerships with Major League Soccer clubs appear to be vital given the resources those organizations have, to the point that future expansion clubs should be willing to do anything in their power to partner with MLS teams, even in an informal manner, such as sharing customer databases. The advent of social media and new media also gives wise clubs a chance to provide in-depth coverage from passionate advocates of the game that simply are not available to them in traditional media channels as of yet. Utilizing these channels is a must for clubs to provide vital attention to their product and potentially attract sponsors and other funding.

Efforts at inclusion involving previously ignored LGBT groups have been met warmly and allowed clubs and the league to broaden its fanbase while pushing for equality. The days of ignoring LGBT groups for the sole purpose of not offending conservative families appears to be a dead issue, even if there are some faint traces of hesitancy built upon trying to placate everyone at once. LGBT groups have a passion for women's soccer in many respects, and building this

type of devoted fanbase is a must for long-term viability. Outreaches and partnerships with LGBT groups have worked for clubs like Chicago, and replicating that throughout the league would likely be a successful venture and boost the overall profile of the league and its clubs.

As painfully obvious as it sounds on paper, clubs have seemingly discovered that appealing to the LGBT community does not automatically mean sacrificing the ability to tout your players as role models to your target audience. Lahue was most vociferous in her belief that her club's players' status as role models should not be something to be shied away from but something to be embraced. This would seem to be common sense given how interaction with the youth market has been such a key cog of marketing plans past and present, but some have feared clubs being cornered into a hollow stereotype as role model first, world class athlete second. In the future, the ability to wear multiple 'hats' as role model for kids, elite athlete, and pillar for LGBT equality may be key for clubs in their effort to stand out in a crowded sport landscape.

However, it should be noted that while the league and its clubs have taken steps towards equality in terms of trying to bridge gaps in coverage between male and female sport, as well as to cater to marginalized target markets such as the LGBT community, equality does not appear to have quite arrived at management level. Of the five teams granting interviews, only Chicago's marketing official giving an interview was a woman. Additionally, the league, now in its third season presents the muddled optics of being a women's sport league with eight of its nine head coaches being men, with Laura Harvey in Seattle being the only female coach. It is a continuation of a situation running rampant in collegiate athletics after the implementation of Title IX, with male coaches dominating women's sport (Benbow, 2015).

Finally, there appears to have been a fundamental shift on the attitude towards players being able to display their bodies as they wish off the field, at least from the team perspective.

The era of moral scolds that argued at the top of their lungs that players posing provocatively for calendars or swimsuit issues appears to have ended, with the most criticism instead being focused at who exactly is chosen to appear in those pictorials. From vehemently criticizing these displays on principle, criticism has instead been centered around the overwhelmingly homogenous type of player chosen to pose for these photos, almost always the definition of stereotypical heteronormative femininity.

Club officials have largely stepped away from dictating what is ‘appropriate’ for players in terms of these pictorials, allowing players to claim a powerful degree of agency over their bodies and the image of said bodies. However, a last battleground has emerged in terms of an official league stance towards these photo shoots. The league appears happy to benefit from publicity while quietly telling clubs not to overtly promote such pictorials. Such a stance may be pragmatic in the short-term, but one suspects that in the long-term, the league will have to take an official stance on revealing photo shoots involving their athletes as they continue to be in demand.

The impact of feminist themes on marketing sectors of NWSL clubs. This article of the study showed that the march of progress towards equality, a key feminist goal, is still very much an ongoing process given some of the challenges still facing NWSL clubs and the league as a whole. While the interviewed officials were surprisingly happy with the coverage they did receive from the media, locking down that coverage was difficult. Inequality between men’s and women’s sport coverage in the media has plagued the latter for decades and shows little sign of abating soon, especially in the traditional media. Following Wood’s example from his interactions with Australia’s professional league, clubs and the NWSL as a whole may have to try to woo the media with special events such as luncheons to try and develop relationships that

could lead to more coverage. The reality is, however, that without a stable television deal, media coverage may still be hard to come by from other sources.

Clubs have been fully invested in social media as well, using it to build a small, but devoted group of hardcore fans. Continuing to leverage these tools will be key, especially for clubs needing to maximize bang for their buck in terms of media reach. Finding solutions to other challenges like suitable stadiums and adequate player compensation are trickier if the interviewed marketing officials are to be believed. The clubs with MLS partnerships have fared best with stadiums, while others have largely found out that trial and error and sacrifice may be necessary to find a decent facility. With problems like expensive leases and a lack of control over things like concessions hampering revenues, clubs will have to battle hard and creatively to best deliver an experience that pleases fans but doesn't break the bank.

Raising risible salaries for the end of the bench type players may be the trickiest problem of them all, as until the league starts bringing in more revenue, the back half of rosters may well be a revolving door of players coming out of college and exiting the league after a few seasons due to the financial grind. These challenges only underline the difficulties in achieving the feminist goal of equality between men's and women's sport, even if the will is there to make parity happen.

From conversation with Gooley, it is also apparent that catering merchandise towards an adult female fanbase would best benefit clubs in the future. While all of the NWSL clubs have been grateful and reliant on Nike for much of their merchandise options, apparel and beyond, Gooley noted that Sky Blue FC went further in trying to appeal to the adult female market. While some of these efforts have dealt in stereotypical heteronormatively feminine products, others have been more practical offerings appealing to the active, physically fit woman. While Nike and

others have been trying to build this consumption community, ultimately, clubs and the league must take it upon themselves to maximize revenue opportunities from merchandising.

An increased focus on a more diverse target market than just families and young children can be evidenced from approaches like the above with merchandise options targeting adult females, an underexploited market. Further measures to attract adult fans like serving alcohol at games and having team meet-ups after games at restaurants and bars have also been embraced by some clubs as ways to attract older fans. Additionally, clubs have been all too willing to help with the building of supporters' clubs for their teams, giving the devoted adult fan a way to coordinate with other like-minded individuals to best express their fandom. Finally, the initial steps to bring LGBT groups into the fold should be continued and expanded upon. Such groups have already displayed their devotion to past leagues but were overlooked, robbing the leagues of a potential devoted market. Given the positive strides already shown in marketing to those groups in the first few years of the NWSL, appealing to LGBT communities could well be a key to building a base that helps the league towards long-term viability.

However, it must be noted that moves towards equality in terms of broadening the base of target markets towards more adult fans simply is not pragmatic at times given the cold financial reality facing teams and the league. With clubs depending so much on selling secondary services to the youth and family market, it is only natural that these organizations would go out of their way to direct a large amount of their marketing resources and energy towards appeasing these critical stakeholders. However, the lessons of WUSA and WPS have shown clubs and the NWSL that a sole focus on families and youth groups is just as short-sighted as ignoring them completely. Other sport leagues such as the LPGA have shown that it is in fact possible to successfully target multiple markets and grow their brand.

Limitations

Certain limitations may have affected this study in ways that could be addressed in future studies. Multiple efforts were made to contact team marketing officials with all nine NWSL clubs, and the researcher was able to establish initial contact with representatives of all teams but was unable to confirm interview times for four of the contacted officials despite multiple attempts. Despite the absence of participation from four of the league's nine clubs, the researcher still reached data saturation with the five interviews conducted, as well as with the collection of archival material as no new or unique information was being gained at the end of the data collection process. While the researcher was able to gain the participation of a majority of the clubs involved in the league, including representatives of each region and each club size in the league, interviews with the other four other clubs in the future could provide further insight into the challenges and successes of each club.

Additionally, due to the timeline of this study, interviews were conducted in the middle of each club's season. As a result, marketing initiatives that had been instituted at the beginning of the season may have not had time to fully develop, potentially tempering responses in certain cases. Given a longer timeline for this study, multiple interviews with parties could allow researchers to hear of marketing initiatives for the coming season in interviews before the season while getting evaluations of the outcomes of those initiatives in follow-up interviews conducted after the season. However, the interviewer was sure to cover a broad base of time with the interview subjects to establish clarity on both ongoing marketing initiatives, as well as past ones.

Financial limitations also restricted the scope of the interviews conducted by the researcher. Due to an inability to travel to meet with interview subjects in person, interviews were conducted over the phone and recorded through the researcher's computer, as well as with a

handheld audio recorder for purposes of redundancy and as a failsafe against technical malfunctions. While cell phone signals were, for the most part, satisfactory, some fluctuations in audio quality were inevitable. However, this did not alter the overall quality of the interviews. Unintelligible portions of audio were marked as such, and when necessary, the interviewees were asked for clarifications. Ideally, future interviews will be conducted in person, but the phone interview practices conducted by the researcher for this study were adequate given the purpose of the study and the limitations of the researcher.

The researcher aimed to collect financial documents and records from NWSL clubs and the league to triangulate data, but this process was rendered near impossible by league policy. Despite multiple requests, the researcher was refused such documents, claiming that it was league policy to not release financial records of clubs or the league to the public. The researcher attempted to corroborate information with interviewees and with third-party media sources, but there were still notable gaps in hard financial information concerning the NWSL and its member clubs through the first two seasons of its existence.

Additionally, the transferability of the results within this study may be limited in nature. Lincoln and Guba (1985) note that the transferability of findings refers to how applicable a study's findings may be within other contexts. In terms of this study, applying the results of this study to other women's sport contexts should be approached with caution. The NWSL's unique nature in terms of organization with features such as top player salaries being paid by national federations is not replicated in other major women's sport associations such as the WNBA (basketball) or the LPGA (golf). To that point, other leagues such as the LPGA have targeted entirely different constituencies in terms of target markets, meaning many of the findings in this

study, especially with target market emphasis, may not be transferable to these women's sport contexts.

While the researcher had little reason to doubt the candor of interview participants, nonetheless, the interviewer still had to depend on the interview subjects' full and complete honesty with their answers to the interviewer's questions. The researcher attempted to triangulate details with outside documentation when available, though above league policy on official documentation made things exceedingly difficult. Though each participant was comfortable enough to allow for the use of their full names in association with their statements in interviews, multiple participants also chose to make off-the-record statements to the interviewer to avoid broaching sensitive topics in a public forum. The interviewer complied with these wishes to further build a rapport and trust with participants to ensure on-the-record statements would be made with candor and full disclosure.

Finally, while the researcher used feminist theory as the underpinning for this dissertation, he also acknowledges the limitations in its use considering his status as a white, heterosexual male. Though the researcher empathizes with his subjects and seeks to use this dissertation as a tool to advance professional women's soccer closer to equality, a primary goal of feminism, he concedes that he is a beneficiary of gender privilege, potentially leaving him blind to certain inequities felt by groups he is trying to study. Though the researcher tried to mitigate this privileged status through constant evaluation and re-evaluation through introspection, a certain unavoidable bias will always be present because of the researcher's privileged status as a white, heterosexual male.

Future Directions

While this study has filled pressing gaps, both theoretically and practically, in terms of the marketing of professional women's soccer in the United States, specifically through themes of feminism, room for further contributions along this line of study exists. Though this study was able to synthesize resource material to produce a comprehensive history on the marketing of professional women's soccer in the United States, gaps still do exist, especially in the era of women's soccer before the 1999 FIFA Women's World Cup, and to a smaller extent, between the 1999 FIFA Women's World Cup and the advent of Women's Professional Soccer (WPS). Further interview studies with officials who worked with the Women's United Soccer Association, U.S. Soccer, and other organizations within that time frame could help with developing a richer point of perspective of the history of marketing of professional women's soccer in the United States. Additionally, such sources could aid with document collection, a vital component in piecing together the marketing history, as much of said documents have not been archived on the internet to this point.

Along this line, interviews with international women's soccer marketing officials would also be helpful in building a base of knowledge about women's soccer marketing in general. Parts of the marketing of women's soccer in the United States have been expressly contrasted with that of the marketing of women's soccer abroad to emphasize the 'freedom' and 'empowerment' that being an American women's soccer player or fan entails when compared with restrictions both formal and informal around the sport in other countries. Interviews with foreign officials could serve to not only inform about marketing practices for women's soccer in other countries but bring current American marketing practices into relief through a process of comparison and contrast.

The age of the NWSL also inhibited some questions from being answered, such as how winning and losing affects marketing and attendance for clubs. At just two years old, identities of clubs have yet to be truly crafted, with no real designations of which teams are ‘powerhouses’ and which are ‘lovable losers’. As an example, the league’s Seattle franchise finished seventh of eight teams in 2013 but won the regular season title in 2014 by a large margin. Assumptions that winning would be directly correlated with high attendance are not automatic either, as in 2014, the league’s worst team, Houston, finished second in average attendance, while eventual champions FC Kansas City finished eighth of nine teams (Gehrke, 2014). Once more clubs’ competitive identities have been more fleshed out, an examination into how clubs adjust their marketing according to the success of their team on the pitch would be useful.

Another area of interest in potential future study is that of social media. Since the early days of WPS, social media has been an important building block in teams’ marketing plans, to the extent that the decision to downsize the league’s social media department proved to be a grave error for WPS. NWSL clubs in this study underlined the importance of social media for purposes of news dissemination, feedback, and community building. A more in-depth study of the social media plans and practices of clubs and the league as a whole could provide greater insight into how these activities affect clubs’ marketing activities as a whole.

While the interviews with marketing officials for the five NWSL clubs allowed for a detailed examination of a prominent set of stakeholders involved with the marketing of professional women’s soccer in the United States, to develop a more complete picture, other sets of stakeholders need to be analyzed. This includes the fans and supporters of professional women’s teams, whose patronage is vital for the continued existence and growth of the clubs and the league itself. While this study was able to get a detailed take of the marketing history and

strategies for clubs and the league, the effectiveness of these strategies in the eyes of the fans is largely unknown, with the only real measure thus far being that of attendance, a crude measure at best. Quantitative studies incorporating survey scales would be an effective way to measure the efficacy of marketing initiatives both within teams and between teams as well and could possibly allow for a refinement of marketing strategies for clubs and the league to be able to utilize the most efficient methods to gain the best results for the least money.

Another important stakeholder that needs more study is one crucial to the success and growth of the league: the players. With many of the players making the brunt of the sacrifices in salary and opportunity to give the league a viable source of credible labor, their voice is one that needs to be heard. Interviews with players could be another illuminating factor as to the depth of some of the sacrifices they make and the inequities they face to make the gears of the professional women's soccer machine keep turning. By candidly making known some of their concerns, their triumphs and struggles, both management and player alike can benefit in creating a just and viable enterprise that can meet the needs and wants of both parties.

Finally, other stakeholder groups that do not come to mind as often when looking at such groups to study could be examined, such as the media and sponsors. Qualitative interview studies and document analysis could illuminate how the media has presented clubs and the league and why they are presented the way they are. Additionally qualitative studies incorporating survey scales could offer candid feedback to clubs and leagues as to how they can improve and in which areas they are succeeding. Such feedback could help foster productive partnerships between clubs and the league and these stakeholder groups to enrich both.

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APPENDIX A – THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

The following justifies my selection of methodology for this proposed research project on feminism and the marketing of professional women's soccer in the United States. Covered in this section will be my epistemology (how I know what I know), an explanation of my theoretical perspective and its effect on my selected methodology for this proposed study in terms of research design, as well as its effect on the methods I propose to use in data gathering and analysis.

Crotty defines epistemology as “the theory of knowledge embedded in the theoretical perspective and thereby in the methodology” (p.3). Some of the most common epistemological views include objectivism, subjectivism, and constructivism, though some only recognize the first two (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Those believing in objectivism see reality being separate from consciousness, effectively indicating the existence of one sole truth (Crotty, 1998; Trochim & Donnelly, 2006). By contrast, subjectivism states that reality is actually a construct of an individual's mind, in effect pointing towards no “one truth”, in lieu of separate truths for separate individuals (Crotty, 1998; Trochim & Donnelly, 2006). Constructivism largely serves as a middle ground between objectivism and subjectivism, where one “constructs” the truth through how one interacts via our minds with the world. As such, different people may construct different meanings in different ways when presented with the same stimulus. This proposed study uses a constructivist epistemological perspective. While certain facets of the sport of women's soccer are grounded in an objective, tangible reality such as scores, attendance, and finances, the meaning of those numbers and the larger meaning of the sport itself is constructed

by its actors and those involved with the sport, such as management, players, and fans. Adopting this viewpoint enables me to examine and analyze this “construction” associated with the sport and its marketing.

Theoretical perspectives have been defined as ways a researcher chooses to explain their understanding and explanation of society, while grounding assumptions that fuel the researcher’s choice of methodology (Crotty, 1998). A wide variety of theoretical perspectives have been utilized by researchers in the past and present, including positivism and post-positivism, critical theory, and feminism (Crotty, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Positivism, a theoretical perspective that largely goes hand in hand with objectivism and favored in quantitative research, states that scientific inquiry is only possible and able to be validated with experience and direct measurement (Trochim & Donnelly, 2006). Post-positivism largely came about as a refutation of positivism, with those subscribing to this school of thought believing they can instead draw inferences from theory, reason, and personal experience (Trochim & Donnelly, 2006).

Two types of post-positivism are critical realism and feminist theory, both of which are used as my personal theoretical perspectives in this proposed study. Critical realism does acknowledge a reality independent of our knowledge but criticizes assessment of that knowledge, stating that it is impossible to understand reality with perfect precision (Frauley & Pearce, 2007; Trochim & Donnelly, 2006). For a period in time, feminism was concerned purely with disparities in power, both in a social and legal sense, between the sexes (Lykke, 2010). The advent of third-wave feminism began to look deeper beyond these simple disparities and towards inequalities built through differences in race, sexual orientation, and economic status in addition to gender (Zack, 2005).

Critical realism allows me to acknowledge that while each of the marketing professionals being interviewed in separate case studies may have similar views as to their marketing of professional women's soccer, those views are likely to be infused with their own biases due to individual experiences and views. While those interviewed are likely to hold the same position in the management hierarchy of their different clubs, the background of each individual is likely to differ in minor or major ways. As such, a greater interpretation of the data is possible, even if an objective "truth" is unlikely to be revealed.

The use of feminist theory, specifically through the lens of third-wave feminism, allows me to deconstruct and analyze the marketing strategies and practices of the various clubs used in these proposed case studies. Far from being an enterprise created "by women, for women", women's soccer's marketing development has in large part mirrored the evolution of feminism to its third wave existence. Matters of economic status and sexual orientation have become paramount in the third wave feminist perspective, and likewise, such matters have taken on an increasingly important role as women's soccer and its leaders actively seek to fill a niche.

Methodology is how epistemology is translated into practice through research (Trochim & Donnelly, 2006). Crotty defines research methodology as "the strategy, plan of action, process or design lying behind the choice and use of particular methods and linking the choice and use of methods to the desired outcomes" (Crotty, 1998, p. 3). A wide variety of methodologies are employed for research purposes, including experimental research, surveys, ethnographies, discourse analysis, and case studies (Crotty, 1998; Gratton & Jones, 2004; Yin, 2008). With my theoretical perspectives of critical realism and feminist theory, I have chosen to utilize a case study approach, featuring the use of interviews and the collection and analyzation of archival material (Yin, 2003). Such an approach will allow me to focus on the individual marketing

officials for each club and similarities and differences in strategies and practices in the marketing of professional women's soccer through feminist themes.

Methods are a researcher's techniques and procedures used to both gather and analyze data for a research project (Crotty, 1998). Like methodologies, there are many possible methods available to researchers. Some research methods available include surveys/questionnaires, focus groups, content analysis, observations in the field, and interviews (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). In this proposed study, a combination of content analysis of archival material and interviews with marketing officials of NWSL clubs will be used to build a case study. This combination of data gathering methods lets the researcher weave together numerous separate observations about the subject of the research even with their overt connections to each other. Data will be gathered through archival material currently existing, such as press releases, print advertisements, and business documents, as well as through the creation of data through interviews to allow for interpretation of the experiences of the interview subjects. These methods fit my own constructionist perspective, which is a compromise between objectivist and subjectivist perspectives.

To decrease any potential influence I may have as a researcher on an interview subject, I will be sure to take certain measures. I will not lead the interview subject towards any specific desired answer by asking open-ended questions that are objective and non-leading. Part of critical realist theory notes that errors are certainly possible during observation, so the researcher will engage in triangulation with multiple sources of data via interviews and the collection and analysis of archival material in the process of building cases in this study (Trochim & Donnelly, 2006).

APPENDIX B – INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR NWSL TEAM MARKETING OFFICIALS**1. General Information**

- a. What is your name and role with your club?
- b. How long have you been with this club?
- c. How did you come into your current position with this club?
- d. What are some of the general marketing goals of your club?
- e. What is the overall mission of your marketing activities with your club?
- f. In broad terms, can you describe some of the major marketing initiatives of the club?
 - i. Traditional media?
 - ii. New/Social media?

2. Inequity of Rules, Resources, and Coverage

- a. Can you describe some of the financial challenges your club faces in comparison to men's professional soccer teams?
 - i. In comparison to other past women's pro teams?
 - ii. To the USWNT?
- b. Could you explain the effect of your club's salary structure on your players?
 - i. Challenges? Limitations?
 - ii. Effect on recruitment?
- c. Can you explain to me your club's overall sponsorship strategy and detail some of your current sponsors?
 - i. Benefits to the club from relationship with sponsors?
 - ii. Help in club viability?
 - iii. How does the club make itself appealing to sponsors?

- d. How was the current venue the club plays at selected?
 - i. Strengths?
 - ii. Limitations? Why these limitations? How are they mitigated?
 - e. Can you explain some of the differences in travel arrangements between your club and clubs in other sport leagues?
 - i. Compared to other past women's club teams?
 - f. What is your opinion of the extent of the media coverage of the NWSL and its teams in comparison to the USWNT?
 - i. Compared to current men's leagues and past women's teams and leagues?
 - ii. TV deal? Media rights? Social media's effect?
 - iii. Club's efforts to attract more media attention?
3. Embracing Motherhood, Family Values, and Role Models while Shunning The "Other"
- a. What target markets does your club gear its marketing efforts to?
 - i. By class? Race?
 - ii. Why these markets?
 - iii. How delineated/in which ways?
 - b. The United States Women's National Team (USWNT) and other women's soccer players have helped disprove some of the pernicious myths surrounding women's participation in sport, specifically through themes of female empowerment. Can you explain the club's role, if any, in continuing with this tradition?
 - c. What, if any, responsibility do you feel in presenting a product that is more than merely entertainment/a sporting contest?
 - d. Can you describe some of the values you look for in players besides on-field talent?

- i. Perception of players as role models? Promotion as such?
- e. Has <NWSL CLUB NAME> engaged the LGBT community?
 - i. How?
- f. What is your opinion on the traditional media's portrayal of your players?
 - i. Of social media's portrayal?
- g. What is your opinion of cause marketing as far as promoting women's soccer is concerned?
 - i. Effect on marketing decisions?

4. Ideal Heteronormative Femininity & A Consumption Community

- a. Can you explain some of your philosophies behind your operations of promotions and merchandising?
 - i. Specific products and promotions?
 - ii. Products specifically marketed to women? Young girls?
- b. If you could describe your marketing with a singular, overarching theme, what would that theme be?
- c. Can you provide an example of a specific marketing campaign you have designed and implemented recently?
 - i. Difference between traditional and social media campaign?
- d. Can you detail some of the steps you take to market some of your players individually?
 - i. Specific players your club markets?
 - ii. Decision process on who is chosen?
- e. What role does athleticism play in designing marketing campaigns for your players on your club, if any?

- i. More/less important than a players' values?
 - f. Some players have posed in swimsuits, revealing outfits, or tastefully nude in recent years.
What is the opinion of your club on these portrayals?
 - g. Could you explain some ways in which your organization has utilized merchandising to reach target markets?
5. Is there anything else you would like to mention or discuss?

APPENDIX C - INTERVIEW DATA BREAKDOWN

Name	Organization	Transcription Length (Time)	Transcription Length (Pages)	Transcription Length (Words)
Ryan Wood	Boston Breakers	1:35:26	22	14,045
Alyse LaHue	Chicago Red Stars	1:20:36	22	13,262
Brian Budzinski	FC Kansas City	47:26	9	4,555
Mike Golub	Portland Thorns	22:46	6	2,807
Jim Gooley	Sky Blue FC	1:05:24	15	8,836

APPENDIX D – INFORMATION LETTER

Hello, <NAME OF RECRUITMENT TARGET>, your participation is requested for a research study being conducted by Chris Henderson, a doctoral student in the Department of Kinesiology at the University of Georgia, and Dr. James Zhang, a professor in the Department of Kinesiology at the University of Georgia.

The purpose of this study is to investigate the marketing of professional women's soccer in the United States through themes of feminism. Participants will be asked to participate in semi-structured phone interviews with the researcher whose audio will be recorded and transcribed for analysis. This study is expected to last approximately sixty to ninety minutes and may be split into multiple sessions dependent on time constraints of the interviewee.

As a marketing official with a professional women's soccer club in the United States, your opinions would be greatly valued for this study. Further questions may be directed towards Chris Henderson at chrish84@uga.edu or Dr. James Zhang at jamesz48@uga.edu.

APPENDIX E – CONSENT FORM

CONSENT FORM

I, _____, agree to participate in a research study titled "FEMINISM & THE MARKETING OF PROFESSIONAL WOMEN'S SOCCER" conducted by Chris Henderson from the Department of Kinesiology at the University of Georgia under the direction of Dr. James Zhang, Department of Kinesiology, University of Georgia. I understand that my participation is voluntary. I can refuse to participate or stop taking part at anytime without giving any reason, and without penalty or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled. I can ask to have all of the information about me returned to me, removed from the research records, or destroyed.

The reason for this study is to investigate the methods and strategies in which professional women's soccer has been marketed in the United States in the past and at present, specifically through lenses of feminism, target marketing, sponsorship, and service quality. If I volunteer to take part in this study, I will be asked to do the following things:

- 1) Participate in an approximately sixty-to-ninety minute phone interview that will be recorded via audio tape about how my organization markets women's soccer through themes of feminism.

The benefits for me are that I may gain greater insight as to how women's soccer at the professional club level is marketed in the United States.

This study has no foreseeable risks associated with it. However, participants may choose to stop the interview at any time for any reason.

Audio data gathered by the investigator will be stored on a digital cassette in a secure filing drawer that the primary and secondary investigators will have access to. The identities of participants will not be kept anonymous, as all participants are members of the recognizable public sphere. Similarly, all statements made

in interviews will be considered “on the record” and will be connected to interviewees in write-ups of findings. Participants may be contacted for follow-up studies if consent is given below.

The investigator will answer any further questions about the research, now or during the course of the project. Chris Henderson can be reached at chrish84@uga.edu or at 770-856-0895. Dr. James Zhang may be reached at jamesz48@uga.edu or at 352-262-8999.

I give my permission for the researchers to contact me with follow-up study opportunities.

Circle one: YES / NO. Initial ____.

I understand that I am agreeing by my signature on this form to take part in this research project and understand that I will receive a signed copy of this consent form for my records.

Name of Researcher
Telephone: _____

Signature

Date

Email: _____

Name of Participant

Signature

Date

Please sign both copies, keep one and return one to the researcher.

Additional questions or problems regarding your rights as a research participant should be addressed to The Chairperson, Institutional Review Board, University of Georgia, 629 Boyd Graduate Studies Research Center, Athens, Georgia 30602-7411; Telephone (706) 542-3199; E-Mail Address IRB@uga.edu

APPENDIX F - PARTICIPANT CLUB INFORMATION

Name	Established	Previous Pro Women's Soccer Experience	MLS Owned	2014 Average Attendance	Stadium (Capacity)
Boston Breakers	2001	Yes	No	2,437	Harvard Stadium (30,323)
Chicago Red Stars	2007	Yes	No	2,949	Village Sports Complex (3,600)
FC Kansas City	2012	No	No	2,018	Verizon Field (3,200)
Portland Thorns	2012	No	Yes	13,362	Providence Park (20,438)
Sky Blue FC	2007	Yes	No	1,640	Yurcak Field (5,000)

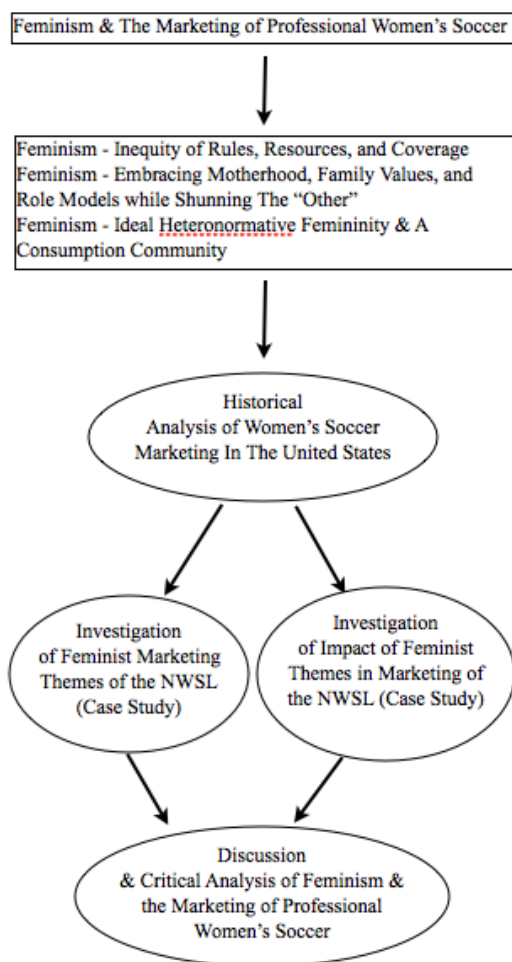


FIGURE 1. THEORY AND RESEARCH PROPOSAL FLOW CHART