

# Woman/Athlete?

## Can You Tell One

BY DAYNA B. DANIELS

*L'auteure annonce que l'auto-surveillance des femmes sur leur corps est insidieuse. Les médias qui endossent presque exclusivement le modèle hétérosexuel et celui de la femme féminine chez la femme athlète peuvent affecter sa perception d'elle-même comme athlète et comme femme. Cette étude examine un des signifiants de la féminité et l'image de soi chez les femmes athlètes.*

The body/self relationship of the woman athlete is an important site for the development of an understanding of the connection that women athletes have with and to their bodies on and off the playing field. One dimension of this relationship connects to the socially constructed notions of femininity, compulsory heterosexuality display, and the perpetual self-surveillance to which many young women subject themselves. This paper focuses on one aspect of women athletes: femininity and the presentation of self through bodily adornment.

In her essay *Foucault, Femininity and the Modernization of Patriarchal Power*, Bartky enumerates three categories of appearance and display that define a body as feminine: "those that aim to produce a body of a certain size and general configuration; those that bring forth from this body a specific repertoire of gestures, postures, and movements; and those that are directed toward the display of this body as an ornamental surface" (64). This paper will present work from a study related, primarily, to Bartky's third point—display of the body as an ornamental surface. My interest, in this study, is in the motivation and extent of body decoration of university aged women ath-

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letes with respect to tattoos, body piercings, and/or other visible or hidden body adornments.

### The body as a canvass

A woman's use of her body as a canvass upon which to create a public and/or private display is a practice that has existed for centuries. Whether to attract males, to broadcast power or difference relative to other females, or to simply please herself, cosmetic practice has taken many forms and has been carried to myriad extremes by women in most cultures. Contemporary Western societies are seeing certain, most commonly, young women (and men) tattoo, pierce, dye, cut, burn, brand, and surgically alter their skin and other body parts.

It is somewhat doubtful that the extremes of body manipulation will ever be seen among most contemporary women athletes. Athletes, traditionally, have a tendency to be more

conservative than their peers. Bartky's first and second points might also provide insight into the reluctance of women athletes to engage in certain presentation practices. This is outside the scope of this particular paper. However, investigation into the extent of body decoration and the reasons for it ought to shed interesting light on an on-going struggle between women athletes and social standards of femininity.

### The changing rules of femininity

Contemporary social constructions of femininity are changing to include a body that is stronger, more toned, and fit through physical activity. Throughout the twentieth century, female athleticism and femininity have been at odds, so this change might be perceived as a step in the right direction for the inclusion of women athletes into the realm of the feminine. However, even the new ideal female body image (read: feminine woman) is smaller and thinner than most women athletes, not to mention most human females at all. Gymnasts and figure skaters may still fit into this picture of feminine, but these culturally normative sports for girls (more so than women) are acceptable activities for females partly because of the visual perception of feminine signifiers, including the body. The tremendous amounts of strength and power within these bodies is not recognized within the context of grace, flexibility, and the aesthetics of the sports themselves and the females bodies that are successful in them.

Women in North American society are obsessed with their bodies

# When You See One?

and body images. How girls and women learn femininity is insidious. The struggle for the acceptance of girls' and women's involvement in sport and physical activity might be nearly over. However, the ideal of the feminine woman and the visual image of the female athlete are still not congruent in our culture.

## **Our embodied selves: Theoretical foundations**

Turner focuses on the relative invisibility of bodies in sociological theory as an "analytical gap" (30). As humans, we are embodied. We cannot go anywhere or do anything without paying concerns to our corporeal self. Particularly, in the study of physical activity the embodiment of the subject is central to any analysis. To overlook the body and any social construction of its values and restrictions is to lose the meaning at the core of one's analysis (Theberge). When sport is labelled a male domain, it is not necessarily the male body, but the construction of masculinity and culture, that is the locus of any analysis. But when woman is the subject, the body becomes, not only object, but central to the most basic analysis.

Bordo, in expressing a post-structuralist view, describes the body as a medium of text or culture. The body, quite literally, embodies the rules and constraints of culture and the construction of gender. This construction of woman-gender is most clearly represented in rules of femininity. From both historical and contemporary philosophical positions "...body-morphology has provided a blueprint for diagnosis and/or vision

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of social and political life" (Bordo 13). Women's involvement in sport has been built from this blueprint, especially in the twentieth century and with increasing compulsion as we begin the new millennium.

Societal beliefs both constrain and dictate how the body is seen and valued. Culture acts to construct the uses of the body regardless of genetics and physiology. Although females are as biologically capable of sport participation as males, the cultural meaning of woman removes most (apparent) athletic competence from the narrow range of characteristics that are approved as feminine. It will be discussed later that this, itself, lays a foundation for struggle between the physical appearance requirements for the feminine=woman and the appearance/performance nature of physical activities and sports for women.

Feminist analyses of gender and power relations between the sexes contend that discourses of the female

body are primarily expressions of male interests and male concerns. "The hegemonic success of these discourses means that phallogocentric and patriarchal meanings threaten to preempt all other, more positive readings of women's bodies" (Miller and Penz 148). The physical appearance of women's bodies is the most visible and recognizable factor of compliance with the rules of femininity. The expression of physical competence through most sports is a quick indicator of non-compliance with the rules of femininity. Thus, positive readings of women's bodies, therefore, women, are difficult to find within the contextual medium of sport.

## **Femininity**

Femininity and masculinity are not mutually exclusive constructs, although their signifiers are. To be "*feminine*" is also to be "*not masculine*." One has little freedom to choose those characteristics that best reflect who one is or wants to be as a person. The embedded meaning of what it is to be feminine is immediately challenged by women who wish to participate in sports—activities that are measured, and most highly valued, in terms of physical competence, strength, power, and aggression. These signifiers are masculine and, *de facto*, cannot fall within the construction of femininity—even as this construct has changed to accept a physically fit and toned body.

"The production of bodies is a means to constitution of social beings and social relations" (Theberge 126). The relations between the sexes are not based on sexual (bio-

logical) difference, but on the power imbalances imposed through the construction of women and men through femininity and masculinity. In a critique of Foucault and his analysis of power and the body, Bartky writes:

Foucault ... is blind to those disciplines that produce a modality of embodiment that is particularly feminine. To overlook the forms of subjection that engender the feminine body is to perpetuate the silence and powerlessness of those upon whom the disciplines have been imposed. (64)

The embodiment of femininity must be analyzed from a broader perspective than that of patriarchal power over women. Bordo argues that "the network of practices, institutions, and technologies that sustain positions of dominance and subordination within a particular domain" (15) must be considered.

#### **Us and them and how we know**

"Scientific" studies of femininity and masculinity began with the work of Terman and Miles in 1936 (Helgeson). The first four decades of this research was primarily concerned with the interests of female and male persons, thus automatically linking socially constructed aspects of personality with a particular sex. Items that indicated interest that apparently revealed differences between genders were labelled feminine and masculine regardless of the context or the construct. Beginning in the 1970s, with the work of Bem, the desirability of characteristics ascribed to women and men was added to the work (Helgeson). The research continued to be problematic as sex and gender were invariably linked by the test subjects and, often, not controlled for by the researchers.

In a 1994 study by Helgeson, subjects were asked to self-identify prototypical features of a feminine female, a feminine male, a masculine

female and a masculine male. The characteristics in all categories broke down into appearance, interests, and personality.

Eight of the twenty-three factors identified for the feminine female relate to appearance, where only three of twenty-one factors for the feminine male are related to appearance.

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Some of the appearance factors that were identified for the feminine female are: long hair, attractive, well done make up, and small (Helgeson). The embodiment of the feminine female plays a major role in her construction.

Relative to masculine features—seven appearance factors for the masculine male are identified. This equates to the amount for the feminine female. The masculine female, however, has ten of twenty-one defining factors that relate to appearance; the most for any group (Helgeson). Except possibly for a few very emancipated women, most females would see almost all of these appearance factors as negative. Appearance factors for the masculine female included: muscular (this was the most frequently indicated appearance characteristic), short hair, no make-up, big, tall, and ugly. The appearance factors listed for the masculine female are not, in themselves, any categorization relative to women

athletes. However, the single-most defining feature of the masculine female, in Helgeson's study, was "likes sports." This sets a very shaky foundation for women athletes who, by the definition set here, are masculine females, whose overall evaluation is based more on appearance than any other factor.

#### **Women athletes and femininity signifiers**

Bartky identifies three categories that represent and are recognizable as feminine. They all relate to the body as opposed to any other factor of woman that might be identifiable as feminine. The categories present a particular dilemma to the female athlete and indicate how the organization of sport can function as an agent to perpetuate the rigid range of compulsory femininity. Female athletes, of certain body types, who participate in certain activities, can be slotted into Bartky's categories quite easily. It is those who cannot who face challenges to their femininity, their womanhood, their sexuality, their value as persons as either perceived by self or others. This paper deals primarily with Bartky's third point, but to illustrate the barriers faced by many women athletes the following brief explanations of Bartky's first two points are offered here.

#### **Production of a body of a certain size and general configuration**

Sports and physical activities that have generally been regarded as gender appropriate for females fit easily into this category. Gymnasts, figure skaters, divers, dancers, synchronized swimmers, aerobics participants, and cheerleaders, in order to be successful, require a body type that is small, flexible, graceful and "feminine" looking. The larger the female athlete gets and the more apparent the strength she displays, the less feminine she may be considered to be. Obviously, the woman body builder, weight lifter, or thrower rejects the

notion of traditional female soma as representative of her femininity, whether or not this is a conscious rebellion. Although the size and shape of her body are part of her natural physiology or structural capacity, and that this might directly contribute to her choice of sport or level of success, these factors may never be considered when her femininity is assessed by others.

### **Repertoire of gestures, postures and movements**

Despite the increasing numbers of girls and women participating in physical activities and the “standard challenging” performances of elite women athletes, sport continues to be, culturally, a male domain. Although there are sporting activities that are deemed gender appropriate for females, these tend to be less high profile, less valued than most men’s sports, regardless of the power, strength, or speed necessary for high performance success.

One might be hard pressed to define many of the gestures and postures that are common to the successful participation in sports as feminine. The tremendous exertion seen on the body and in the face of female shot putter or strain and sweat of a women triathlete would not be classified as feminine by many observers. Neither would elbowing opponents in the key in basketball, a sliding tackle in soccer, being covered with mud and sweat in a three-day event in equestrian competition, or hanging off the side of a cliff be classified as feminine gestures. If the actions performed by women are not identified as feminine, does it follow that the women who execute those actions are not feminine either? The less feminine the actions, the less feminine and consequently more masculine, the performer must be.

### **The display of the body as an ornamental surface**

If the female athlete is considered to

be a gender-incongruent role and the female athlete is also considered to be masculine, then the physical appearance of the female athlete becomes central to the evaluations made of her. In an attempt to overcome any question of femininity in the female athlete, numerous outward

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signifiers of what is considered feminine often adorn the athlete, even when such displays might be inconvenient or even dangerous to the competitor. Flo-Jo (Florence Griffith Joyner) might well be more remembered for her flamboyant uniforms, long and decorated fingernails, flowing hair, and jewellery than for her world-record-setting performances in track and field competition in the Olympic Games. Her powerfully muscled body was a clashing contrast to the ornamentation with which she was adorned.

The premier issue of *Sports Illustrated for Women* displayed a very pregnant Sheryl Swoopes spinning a basketball on her finger. This photo is an interesting contrast of the highly successful woman basketball player—tall, strong, highly skilled, and a pregnant woman—obvious “proof” of the femininity of the subject even though she was dressed in a basketball uniform.

One of the fastest growing specta-

tor sports in North America is figure skating. Figure skating costumes (note that the athletic wear of these athletes—male and female—is not referred to as “uniforms” but the more theatrical term costumes) are often long and flowing or short and revealing, and invariably, are skirted. Many sport flesh-coloured inserts down the front, back, and/or midriff of the costume to imitate low-cut revealing dress. Carefully attended to hair, make-up, and jewellery become a standard part of the competition uniform of the figure skater as well as the synchronized swimmer whose athletic performances are carried out underwater!

Make-up, long and somewhat inconvenient hair-dos or hair ribbons and jewellery are not usually mentioned when one lists the equipment necessary for participation in sport. Many women athletes, however, can be seen using such femininity markers in competitive situations. The contrast between the feminine trappings and the supposedly masculine somatotype of the female athlete reflects the desire/need of some competitors to visually attach feminine signifiers to their sport and to themselves.

### **Holes and hardware**

Although contemporary ideals of femininity are closely monitored and for the most part accepted by many young women today, they are also adding their own twists and markers of individuality to their presentations of self. Of course, as has been the case for a number of generations now, the attention to individuality translates into everyone looking the same as everyone else in their in-group!

Contemporary markers of young women’s self-expression, and presumably one’s presentation of self as feminine, include hair dying in non-naturally occurring hair colours, tattoos and body piercing (beyond the standard and nearly universal pierced ear lobes). Although young males are

also engaging in these forms of body decoration, they do not appear to be a reduction of one's femininity—as long as these body decorations are within accepted standards of the local youth community.

As stated previously, women athletes tend to be more conservative than their contemporaries. This stems from both the traditional sport model which promotes team cohesion and loyalty over individuality, and presentation modes which attempt to display feminine deportment within a traditionally masculine realm. What are the feelings and practices of university aged women athletes relative to themselves as athletes, as feminine/non-feminine females, and the contemporary use of the female athlete's body as a canvass through which she contributes to her presentation of self as woman/athlete?

### Methodology

In an attempt to ascertain the practices of body piercing and tattooing among university aged women athletes, open ended interviews were conducted with university aged women who had both body piercings (other than or in addition to ear piercing) and at least one tattoo. The subjects were between the ages of 19 and 22. The confidential interviews all took place with undergraduate students from a small rural/urban center.

The purpose of the interviews was to gather preliminary data and to develop further the interview instrument. Interviews lasted from 35 to 40 minutes. Questions were asked to ascertain the amount and type of body decoration, the stimulus and personal meaning for the activity, reactions and self-satisfaction with the adornments, participants' personal meanings of femininity, and any continuing involvement with body decoration.

Based on the results of the preliminary interviews a paper and pencil survey was constructed. The sixty-two item questionnaire was designed

to obtain data related to age, ethnic background, year in university, primary sport participation, hair style, and whether or not the athletes had any body piercing or tattoos. There was also a space for participants to enter any written comments or further information that they chose to disclose. The survey was administered to 250 women athletes in twelve Canadian universities located in small, medium, and large centers in Western and central Canada and in the Maritimes. The raw data was analyzed using an SPSS program.

### Results

The subjects who completed the survey were all actively participating on one of forty-four university sponsored sports. Most subjects were of typical university age (19—23 years of age) with 87 per cent of all subjects born between 1978 and 1982. There was fairly equal distribution among subjects relative to their year in university with years one to four each containing approximately 20 per cent of all subjects in this age group. Fifth year subjects comprised just under ten per cent. It ought to be noted that athletes participating in C.I.S. (Canadian Interuniversity Sport) sanctioned sports are permitted to compete for five years in their university careers. Although subjects reported participation in forty-four different sports, the majority (78 per cent) competed in normative Canadian university sponsored sports (Basketball: 20.8 per cent; Field Hockey: 15.5 per cent; Ice Hockey: 9.3 per cent; Rugby: 8.4 per cent; Swimming: 15 per cent; and Volleyball: 8.8 per cent).

Self-reporting indicated that the group was overwhelmingly Caucasian (91.2 per cent) and heterosexual (95 per cent). This group was also primarily able-bodied although data on this factor was not collected.

*Hair Style:* Because long hair has been identified as a feminine female signifier and short hair has been reported as a masculine female signifier,

hair length of the subjects was requested. Only 14.9 per cent of all respondents reported having short hair (shaved heads to hair above the ears was the range in these categories). The majority (85.1 per cent) of the respondents keep their hair long enough to put into a ponytail. There were no significant differences among the ages of the athletes or their sports relative to length of hair.

*Piercing:* The survey contained twenty-six questions related to body piercing including one question which contained six graphics of body parts (face, tongue, left ear, right ear, front of body and back of body) onto which subjects drew the approximate location(s) of all piercings.

The results of this part of the survey indicate that 88.8 per cent of the respondents had some sort of piercing. This number includes ear piercings. Ten percent of the athletes indicated that they had no piercings at all. The shortfall from 100 per cent is made up from subjects not responding to these questions.

Of the athletes who reported having piercings, 99.5 per cent indicated that they had their earlobes pierced. All of the subjects, except one, indicated that their first piercing was the ears. The age of acquiring their first piercing ranged from one week to 22 years old. The one subject, whose first piercing was not her ear lobes, had a navel piercing at the age of 15 years.

One half (50.6 per cent) of the athletes who reported any piercings, indicated that they had one or more piercings done following the initial one. Ninety-one subjects (37.8 per cent of all athletes) had another ear piercing and thirty-one subjects (12.9 per cent of all athletes) had a navel piercing. Fifty-four athletes (22 per cent) reported having three or more piercings. The majority of these were navel piercings, but tongue, nipple, eyebrow, nostril, and labia were also indicated as places of body piercings by some athletes. A number of subjects did indicate that although they had had a variety of piercings, in a

number of cases they reported no longer wearing any jewelry or hardware in those places.

Because the purpose of the study was to investigate body decoration and adornment as a practice of feminine display, the survey queried the visibility of body piercings during competitions. Having jewellery or hardware visible in body piercings visible in competition was reported as Always by 39.4 per cent, Never by 40.4 per cent, and Sometimes by 20.2 per cent of respondents. There were no significant differences among the ages of the athletes or their sports relative to piercing.

*Tattoos:* The survey contained fourteen questions regarding the practice of permanent tattooing and seven further questions regarding the use of temporary tattoos. The practice of tattooing the body was much less practiced among the subjects than was piercing. The percentage of athletes having at least one permanent tattoo was 22 per cent and of these few subjects 59.8 per cent reported that they were not likely to get another one.

The size and location of permanent tattoos was much more varied than was piercing. Subjects reported having tattoos on the top of their feet, ankles, calves, front of hips, buttocks, lower back, back of shoulder, and breast. The most common locations were ankle (3.7 per cent) and the small of the back (7.5 per cent). Although there were no significant differences among athletes in the various sports relative to having a tattoo, swimmers, basketball and field hockey athletes had the greatest percentages of athletes reporting tattoos.



*Photo: Marlene Hielema*

The survey also contained questions on the visibility of tattoos during competition. Of the subjects that reported having a permanent tattoo, 69.1 per cent indicated that their tattoo(s) was never visible during competition, 18.2 per cent indicated that their tattoo(s) was always visible in competition and 12.7 per cent reported that their tattoo(s) could be seen during competition sometimes. There was a lot of variety in the design choice of the permanent tattoos with only about ten per cent coming from school or sport symbols.

Whereas the visibility of permanent tattoos in competition was relatively low, 62.2 per cent of subjects reported that their team sometimes wore temporary tattoos in competition. A further question regarding whether the wearing of temporary tattoos, as a team, was a strong team motivator, 37.8 per cent indicated

that wearing school or mascot logos was always motivating for their team.

## **Discussion and Analysis**

The purpose of this study is to challenge the often stated belief that women athletes, particularly those involved in culturally normative activities for males, are not and even cannot be feminine. If women athletes are seen to be participating in masculine activity, the importance of feminine presentation by the female athlete is often internalized as a means of protecting her reputation and fitting into the mold of the "normal" woman. The data collected on women athletes for this study focused on body

piercing and tattooing as popular forms of bodily adornment. Both of these decorative forms are popular among the young women. As these adornments, especially tattooing, are traditionally seen to be masculine, and in some cases reflective of deviant or antisocial status in the North American context, the adoption of such masculine, deviant body adornment would seem to be antithetical to women athletes who consciously or unconsciously fight the labels of masculine woman and/or lesbian due to their involvement in sport.

For women athletes in North America, displays of femininity within the masculine realm of sport have been obvious for many decades. Long and/or athletically inconvenient hairstyles, hair ribbons, jewellery, makeup, and long, painted fingernails have adorned the bodies of women athletes during practices and competitions and are an attempt to

display a level of femininity which has no contributory asset to their motor performance or athletic excellence. Such *accoutrements* can actually be detrimental to the safety and performance of a woman athlete.

### Piercing

Nearly 90 per cent of the subjects in this study indicated that they had at least one piercing. Of this group 99.5 per cent of these athletes had their ears pierced. The near universal practice of piercing the ear lobes caused the subjects to overlook this as piercing. Many respondents indicated that for cultural reasons their parents had pierced their ears while they were still infants. Although many of the subjects indicated that they got their ears pierced while they were teenagers and therefore had made a conscious effort in getting pierced, many still did not recognize ear piercing as a piercing practice. While taking the survey, many of the subjects asked whether or not ear piercing was to be included in their responses.

Less than 38 per cent of the athletes who completed the study indicated that they had more than one piercing. The majority of these further piercings were located somewhere on the ears. The next most popular location for body piercing was the navel. Obviously, this part of the body would not be publicly displayed during most athletic competitions.

In neither the open ended interviews nor through comments written on the survey did subjects provide any analysis regarding whether putting holes in one's body was problematic. With respect to the issue of femininity, one athlete wrote:

"About piercing, I have my belly button pierced and I think it looks nice and makes me look more feminine, as well it improves the appearance of my stomach. I like jewellery a lot and piercings offer new ways of wearing it." This comment was written by a varsity level wrestler. Wrestling is very much considered a mas-

culine sport. The focus on feminine presentation by a woman wrestler is not surprising.

The issue of safety and body piercing was investigated in the survey. Most athletes who commented on this aspect of the survey indicated that they were aware of the potential for injury. However most of the ath-

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letes did not remove their piercing jewellery or hardware during practice or competitions unless they were required to. A number of athletes also commented that although they have had piercings done they no longer utilize them. A varsity rugby player wrote on her survey that "I have never been in a competitive situation with my belly button ring yet, and admit I am nervous about it." It would be interesting to follow-up on this athlete's future decision regarding wearing hardware during rugby matches.

### Tattooing

Piercing and tattooing (in reality a form of piercing) have been found in nearly every world culture. The word tattoo comes from the Tahitian word Ta-Tu or Tatau (DeMello). In all non-western cultures, tattoos are worn by both females and males and are signifiers of myriad social, familial, and/or tribal statuses.

The practice of tattooing as bodily decoration in the West has moved through strata of culture and gender beginning with military servicemen and carnival exhibitors. The practice was then adopted by working-class males, then marginalized groups such as bikers and convicts. In the late twentieth century, the practice was "sanitized" and seen to be acceptable and accepted by the middle-class, New Agers, and various sectors of individuals practicing cultural resistance (Mifflin; DeMello).

In order to make the practice of wearing a tattoo redeeming to members of the middle class, the biker/not biker stratification was adopted to justify the acceptability of this once "uncivilized" and "undesirable persons" practice. According to DeMello in her work *Bodies of Inscription: A Cultural History of the Modern Tattoo Community*, this "sanitizing" of tattooing practice in the late twentieth century in the West is an aspect of "deterioralization," meaning "a cultural practice is borrowed from its original context and is assigned, or recorded, with a new meaning. In this formulation, the cultural form is freed of its original meaning also while keeping the external form basically the same" (DeMello 12).

In the West, the tattoo is a signifier of difference. It, at the same moment, attracts and repels the viewer within middle-class sensibilities. The tattoo has "obvious physicality," it is permanent, painful, masculine and somewhat sexual (DeMello 13). With the rise of third wave feminism in the 1970s the only group of women recognized as tattoo-able—other than girlfriends of bikers—were lesbians. Tattoo artists were willing to "mark" lesbians because there were no angry husbands to contend with and the women had already permanently relinquished their femininity (DeMello 61). So then, the question that goes begging is why, if women athletes still buy into any femininity apologetic, would their practice of bodily decoration include an activity

defined as masculine and acceptable only for lesbians—the two labels the feminine apologetic is attempting to erase?

The answer to this somewhat paradoxical situation can be found within the tattooing practices of the athletes themselves. Results of the survey indicated that tattoos are never visible in competition for nearly 70 per cent of those respondents who have tattoos. In the words of the athletes themselves:

*I specifically got my tattoos in the places I did because I don't want anyone to see them. They're mine, and if I want to let people see them, I will.*

*I didn't want people to be like "oh, she has a tattoo, so she is different" or she is a different kind of person. Yeah, I didn't want it to be showing when I played. I just don't like the way it looks when you can see people's tattoos when you're playing.*

*When you're playing basketball its [sic] different. More serious than like every day... I don't know... just I don't know, when you're out on the basketball court it's different. I do want to be perceived as not being serious or whatever on the court. I don't think on the basketball court is like a place a wearer for like your individuality to show in that way... your like appearance.*

*I think it's probably less acceptable for athletes to get it done because we're supposed to be always setting examples for other people.*

These final two comments likely reflect the conscious or unconscious feelings of many women athletes, and especially those who may be participating in sports that are culturally normative for males.

An historical investigation of piercing and tattooing reveals that these

practices have traditionally been practiced to provide a visual indicator of status, membership in a group, or right of passage (Mifflin 1997). Comments supplied by a number of the athletes who filled out the survey indicated that this same purpose can be claimed by women athletes who have attained or who hope to attain some athletic goal or achievement.

*You should survey the [X] University rugby team because they all got tattoos after they won the [National] championships.*

*In my final year of high school, the seniors of the soccer team got navel piercings together. This was a team bonding experience.*

*If I ever get a tattoo, I would want it to have a deep meaning so that I would never question why I got it. For example to symbolize a national championship.*

*If we win nationals are team is thinking about getting a team tattoo. (In conversation this player told me that her coach said she would get everyone a tattoo if they won nationals.)*

*We just won the national championships and I know a bunch of us want to get a tattoo to represent what we accomplished.*

*We just won the nationals & a few of the girls are getting [school athletic logo] tattooed on them and possibly piercings.*

*If I make a national team—a leaf (maple) on top of R foot. If I make Olympics rings on back and base of spine.*

In these cases, the acquisition of the tattoo truly embodies one's dreams and aspirations. Marking the body literally marks affiliation with a group, commemoration of an important goal, or it may represent an aspect of identity. With respect to

the adornment of the female athlete's body for the purpose of adhering to compulsory femininity there are some indications that athletes do practice self surveillance in this regard. Whether or not women athletes choose to wear long hairstyles, have body piercings, or tattoos as signifiers of a body in resistance to or compliance with cultural expectations regarding the presentation of female bodies, these adornments, on the bodies of female athletes, can be seen as a new way of controlling and subverting the male gaze by forcing men (and women) to look at women athletes' bodies in a very new way.

## Conclusion

Regardless of her sport, a female athlete risks having her femininity questioned. Even if her personal appearance and mannerisms are unquestionably fitting in the scope of femininity, she may not feel great congruence between her body/self relationship and the perception she has of others' assessments of her. Women athletes are constantly reminded that they are female first. Traditionally, the focus on the bodies of women athletes has contained a judgement relative to adherence to the standards of femininity of the day. It is somewhat apparent, so far in this project, that this phobia of not being feminine is alive and well.

The masculinity and (assumed) heterosexuality of male athletes is assured simply because they are athletes.

Although the importance of physical appearance and presentation is increasing for males in our society, they have a long way to go before the restrictive nature of this evaluation will equal that imposed upon females. Male athletes are particularly favoured with a gender-congruent status. Their physical appearance, although not necessarily considered as strong a factor in their masculinity, is positively highlighted.

The act of sport participation can be one of empowerment for women



(Theberge). The discipline required to train the body ought to be placed within the realm of feminine bodywork. Then the sporting participation of all women can be encouraged and the detrimental conditions of contemporary femininity be altered to include the life-affirming benefits of athletics and physical activity.

Bartky's portrait of the feminine offers one avenue for the exploration of the exclusionary practices that exist in sport and physical activity for many girls and women. As long as what a woman looks like remains more important than anything else that she is or does, and as long as


sport operates as a defining factor of masculinity only, the tyrannical nature of compulsory femininity will continue to constrain women's choices and endanger women's lives. When girls and women are no longer facing labels of gender-deviant or sexual-deviant because they participate in any sport they choose, their associations with their bodies will change. Physical competence and the joy of movement will begin to frame the feminine.

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