Sports Literacy and Rhetoric as Power:

The Privilege of the Literate and Who's Warming the Bench

Preface

In the fall of 2006 at a pre-game tailgate for Notre Dame University's game against the Michigan Wolverines, a man with whom I had been chatting about football appeared clearly unnerved – and articulated his confusion – when I offered relevant football statistics as a part of the conversation. He proceeded, in response, to stop the conversation and to quiz me, demanding that I name six starting offensive players for the Notre Dame 2006 team. Two weeks later when back at school in Ann Arbor, I mentioned to a male colleague of mine that I had been invited to a "gays only gathering" for new students the following week, though I am heterosexual. In response, he joked, "It must be the football thing."

Both of these encounters responded to my sports literacy by scrutinizing my knowledge of sports, in order to either prove my knowledge faulty (and thus make me a woman again), or to make me a different (more masculine?) female subject (a homosexual woman), as a result. I was thus tested and positioned as a particular kind of anomaly to either the world of sports or the "natural" world of men and women. These interactions, among many like them in my life, reveal an anxiety about or confusion around what to do with a female subject who is literate in sports, and conflate sports literacy with masculinity and consequently, particular sexual orientations.

As such, both of these responses nod to my sports literacy as a borrowed literacy, one that is carefully regulated and masculine to the point of evoking confusion or mis-labeling when possessed by a female subject; in these moments, I am given the choice to attempt to penetrate the traditional order and be marginalized and mis-labeled as a result, or to comply with this order, be considered a "woman," and be relegated in a certain way

from sports. Multiple interactions such as these have led me to be interested in the ways that sports literacy and rhetoric function to maintain the privilege and capital of the world of sports for men alone.

(Sports) Literacy and Rhetoric as Constructivist/Exclusionary

In multiple and significant ways, mainstream literacy – the ability to read, write, and speak in culturally-legitimated ways – is a powerful, regulated, and often exclusionary cultural, social tool and economic asset. Throughout history, there have been significant implications for those marginalized from privileged levels and types of literacy, whether through the consequences of Anglocentric bias of U.S. literacy history (Greene 1994), class-based and gendered distinctions of literacy expectations (Robbins 2004), ethnocentric writing practices (Olson 2001), essentialized versions of particular minority literacy histories (McHenry and Heath 1994), or the promoted but inaccurate myth of literacy access and mobility (Graff 1979). Predergrast (2003) argues that literacy has been throughout history, and continues to be, the most "acceptable" way to discriminate on minorities in social, political, and economic ways; analogously, Kliewer, Biklen, and Kasa-Hendrickson describe the denial of literacy as insidious and hegemonic – as "a part of an ideology of control imposed on the marginalized by those who lay claim to the center"(Kliewer et al 2006 p. 186).

These trends exist on macro and micro levels in the processes and practices of literacy. Through multiple avenues, literacy can exclude certain peoples and create a narrow yet pervasive view of literacy and who is il/literate, and who has access to language as power: literacy, in essence, can be a powerful tool for privileging some and

excluding others. The result is a dominant culture both defining and regulating literacy and who has access to it, and in a contemporary world of increasingly specialized yet variant literacies, those with the most cultural and social power regulate which literacies are privileged above others, and in turn determine the (under)privileged *qualities* associated with certain literacies and levels of literacy. This regulation is often facilitated by the rhetoric surrounding literacy, such as the rhetoric of literacy crisis that has been used against black and immigrant communities in the United States in order to maintain literacy as ideally "White property" (Prendergast 2003) and the rhetoric of literacy levels as coded ways to talk about race and citizenship (Young 2004). In these ways, those who "lay claim to the center" (Kliewer et al 2006) can regulate and privilege certain literacies by raising concern about the illiteracy/ies of those on the margins.

One way to regulate privilege is through affirming certain (middle class) codes and practices as what Bourdieu (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977) calls "cultural capital." This cultural capital includes particular resources, knowledge, and ways of speaking that are affirmed by mainstream institutions and thus engender success, thereby reproducing societal exclusions and norms. Cultural capital often functions as a signifier of qualities of privilege – being "cultured" in those things that are valued (in Bourdieu's study, these include seeing particular shows or orchestras, reading particular books, and visiting museums) – rather than *participation* in the forms of cultural capital (such as being in a popular show or orchestra). Prudence Carter (Carter 2005) pushes this notion of cultural capital to claim that all people create cultural capital though only some types of cultural capital are valued according to mainstream standards. Carter focuses on how black urban youth create cultural capital that consists, for example, of certain ways of speaking and

knowledge of hip hop music; these cultural resources become capital for these individuals as they lead to belonging in their black urban community**.** The cultural capital that Carter explores is a kind of cultural literacy, valued by a particular community, but not one that engenders mainstream success. As Carter's and Bourdieu's studies reveal, cultural capital has taken many forms, includes particular literacies, and is influenced by context.

What is dominant cultural capital in the United States, forming amidst the economic demands of capitalism and the age of information (Brandt 2000), is largely dictated by the capitalist model. More specifically, in an age of capitalism, cultural capital valorized by dominant culture is that which that may engender contemporary and capitalist success, whether it be particular skills, for example, computer literacy (Brandt 2000), or particular qualities, such as the competitiveness, initiative, aggressiveness, and confidence of potential capitalist workers and leaders (Cantu 1995, Luke 1988).

Sports in the U.S. seem to offer both skills and qualities deemed cultural capital; playing sports well offers social avenues on almost all ages, sports often engender popularity in schools, and, most visibly, high profile U.S. athletes are some of the richest and most celebrated people in America. Further, just as capitalist enterprise lauds such qualities as initiative, competitiveness, and confidence, sports signify, and are said to foster, these same qualities (Rees 1997, 2001; Branta, et.al 1996). Additionally, as a tangible manifestation of sports as cultural capital and even as engendering capitalist success, Michael Messner stresses that the power of sports is facilitated largely by the structure he calls the "sport-media-commercial complex" (the promotion of high-profile sports and athletes as glamorized and profitable ventures), which keeps sports as "part of a larger, increasingly global economic nexus" (Messner 2002, p. 77).

Sports, then, can be a hugely important economic project as well as source for cultural capital, and are a venture involving people on all levels from athletes, to managers, to sportscasters, to fans, to business sponsors, to various media networks and personnel, and others. Finally, if Allan Luke et al. describe that the post-industrial vision of the ideal citizen/worker is one who is "fitted to corporate cultures and global economies"(1997, p. 6), and the transmission of these qualities is crucial to the spread of capital (Apple 1993), sports becomes crucial as a means for the transmission of capitalism – both by promoting qualities important to capitalism, and by making involvement with sports potent cultural and economic capital. As such, sports are intertwined importantly with capitalist enterprise and lie at the center of U.S. culture. Significant in light of this powerful relationship between sports, U.S. culture, and capitalism, then, is that women have had limited access to the economically- and culturally-significant world of sports for the majority of U.S. sports history, perhaps until their equal participation in sports was mandated by Title IX legislation.

However, what becomes clear through an examination of what largely defines U.S. sports – i.e., the most high profile U.S. sports of football, baseball, and men's basketball – is that the world of sports is shaped and maintained in crucial ways aside from and far beyond actual sports participation. Rather, in many ways, the world of sports is maintained by the sport-media-commercial complex, a complex that keeps the *male* center of sports visible, powerful, and financially secure (Messner 2002).

The sport-media-commercial complex preserves a male center not only through solely male sports as the most valorized sports; two important ways the sport-media-commercial complex conserves that male center is through maintaining masculine sports

rhetoric (e.g., masculine language, and males to use it, as sports are promoted and covered), and maintaining sports literacy (e.g., knowledge and set of skills required to participate in this complex and possess sports rhetoric) as a masculine literacy. Masculine sports literacy and rhetoric continually recreate and maintain what defines sports, the cultural and economic capital of sports, and who can lay hold of that capital. Yet in these masculinized definitions and opportunities, women are positioned almost entirely on the margins. Before more explicitly defining the terms sports rhetoric and sports literacy, I want to recapitulate the central ideas offered above: sports hold central economic and capital importance in the U.S; they promote and incorporate the same qualities as those of capitalist success, and the sport-media-commercial complex helps make sports a crucial economic enterprise and source of cultural capital. Thus, knowledge of and/or participation in sports can thus potentially offer important cultural and economic capital; however, in the sport-media-commercial complex, only the highest profile (male) sports define sports and thus the opportunities to access the cultural and economic opportunities of sports. Finally and in tandem, what largely maintains the sport-media-commercial complex are the highly-masculinized rhetoric and literacy of sports.

Next, to more clearly lay out the meanings of sports rhetoric and sports literacy, and their relationship to capitalist qualities, in the scope of this paper: I use rhetoric to mean the conscious use of language, the understanding of the power and use of language, and a way to understand people (Villanueva 1993). By sports rhetoric, then, I mean: first, a conscious understanding of the language of sports – that is, both the semiotic domain (Gee 2003) of each popular sport as well as the history of teams and important players.

Next, sports rhetoric includes an understanding of sports language *use* – that is, an understanding of how sports and sports participants are talked about in the sports-media-commercial complex and the power of that language. Finally, sports rhetoric refers to the ways of understanding people and athletes through sports. All elements of sports rhetoric lead, ultimately, to an understanding of when and how to use sports in ways most that will bring about the most social and/or capitalist gains.

If we focus our attention on the sport-media-commercial complex, we see that sports rhetoric centers almost exclusively on male sports and athletes. (Later, I will discuss how the non-athletes participating in the sport-media-commercial complex are almost all exclusively male as well). Sports rhetoric thus simultaneously creates a way of understanding men as the masters and regulators of sports and sports rhetoric and of understanding women as outside of it (outside, that is, of possessing that rhetoric *or* of being included in that rhetoric). And if rhetoric offers a way to understand one's place in a given sphere amidst these uses and understandings (Young 2004), then in general, men[1] can understand themselves as a part of the world of sports while women largely cannot.

Next, as "sports literacy" is not a widely used or definable term, I turn to other "qualified" literacies to shape a definition. Following other models of various literacies, such as media literacy, information literacy, and other specialized literacies, here I define sports literacy as the competencies required for sports rhetoric – that is, knowledge of when and why and how to access and evaluate sports. Comparatively, a way to think

[1] It is important to note that sexual orientation may change a man's access to sports rhetoric, as high profile sports also promote compulsive heterosexuality and homophobia (Messner and Duncan 2000). I use the term "men" and "male" throughout the paper because I am focusing on the basic and clear gender divide between men and women and how *women* are positioned in dominant sports rhetoric. However, it is important to note that homosexual men may have a more nuanced relationship with sports and are often Othered by the world of sports as well, though I will not address this relationship within the scope of this paper.

about sports rhetoric is as the effective *production* of sports literacy. Here, then, I turn to Allan Luke's (1993) notion that literacy is as much about ideologies, identities and values as it is about acquiring codes and skills.

Indeed, sports literacy contributes as much about the ideologies (hard work, determination and winning under pressure), the identities (heterosexual, male, tough, physical), and the values (initiative, sportsmanship) of the sphere of sports as it contributes to sports rhetoric. It is important therefore that sports literacy becomes uncharacteristic of women; they have very little to do with the ideologies, identities, and values of sports. Women do not have access to the world of sports for a number of reasons, including lack of participation in sports (historically from all sports, and contemporarily, continued lack of participation for two of the three most high profile types of sports, and *all* three of the most followed and covered sports in America), but also – and perhaps even more importantly – a lack of sports literacy and sports rhetoric. It is important that a lack of participation in these high profile sports does not directly account for a lack of sports literacy and rhetoric; that is, participation in sports does not necessarily lead to sports literacy and rhetoric. For example, sports announcers, perhaps the best representative of possessors and shapers of sports literacy and rhetoric, reveal that gender actually plays a far more important role. A little less than half of television sports announcers were not actually professional athletes, yet the grand majority of sports announcers are male[2]. Furthermore, of the 20 "Outstanding Sports Personality" nominees

[2] In the most recent published account, there were 335 male and 81 female sportscasters working in national network and cable television. ESPN numbers are not included because the network would not reveal the number of its male announcers; however, it had 46 female announcers. (USA Today research, USA Today, Sept. 7, 2000; retrieved from Women's Sports International [WSI], 2003).

(from all types of sportscasters) for the 2001 Sports Emmy Awards, none were women (National Academy of Television Arts & Sciences, 2002; retrieved from WSI, 2003).

Women continue to be largely excluded from sports through the *shaping* and *shape of* sports rhetoric. Some concrete, simple examples of the masculine shape of sports rhetoric include such designations as the name of the crucial value sportsmanship (and the violation in many sports of "unsportsmanlike conduct"), the NBA versus the WNBA, female athletes described with qualifiers, for example, as being the best in *women's* basketball versus a male player being described as the best in *basketball*, and the overall mutual exclusivity between a traditional woman and a traditional, high profile athlete.

This mutual exclusivity is communicated in multiple ways. First, because of the central role of the media in the sport-media-commercial complex and U.S. culture, it is highly important that sports news and highlights, sports columns, and sports promotions, make a statement about what they consider "real," or the most important, sports, by the amount of space, time, and anticipation-building previews devoted to coverage of male versus female sports and athletes, which is much higher for male coverage[3]. Even in the women's sport that has received the most attention in the U.S., women's basketball, in a study at Vanderbilt University, researchers found that in three newspapers, *The Tennessean*, *USA Today* and *The New York Times*, men received 82% of all sports coverage and women received 11% (6% of sports coverage included both genders). (Coaching Women's Basketball, Jan./Feb. 1997; retrieved from WSI, 2003).

[3] In sports columns and magazines, women accounted for less than 10% of all text about sports. On T.V., on ESPN's "Sports Center," for example, women received 2.2% of the coverage time in a six-week period; in a study of ESPN and Los Angeles local television networks, both groups also actively built audience anticipation for some sports through previews, but those previews were dominated by the three high profile male sports, and only preview women's sports (of any kind) 2% of the time (Messner and Duncan 2000).

Other female exclusions also leak into in the rhetoric surrounding sports. In April of 2006, Mets broadcaster Keith Hernandez emphatically questioned why a woman was in the dugout because, as he communicated, women didn't belong and only the team training personnel was allowed. When critiqued because the woman *was* a part of training personnel (she was the team's massage therapist for some years), Hernandez stood by his comments, saying live on public broadcasting, "I won't say that women belong in the kitchen, but they don't belong in the dugout" (Associated Press 2006).

Perhaps part of these divisions can persist because in all dimensions of the sport-media-commercial complex, there continues to be a clear divide between someone who is a woman, and someone who is an athlete – or even between someone who is a woman, and someone who knows enough about sports to talk about them in sophisticated ways, as evidenced by the dominance of male sports announcers. In addition to the sports announcers, however, the rhetoric surrounding sports continues to suggest that *male* athletes are really what we are talking about when we mention the athletes *worth* talking about: only four women made the list of *Sport Magazine's* Top 50 Players of the Half-Century (1950-2000)[4] (Sport, Sept., 1996); in TV Guide's list of TV's 50 Greatest Sports Moments, only 3½ featured women[5] (TV Guide, July 11-16, 1998); and in ESPN's list of the top 100 athletes of the 20th century, only eight women were listed[6] (ESPN, 1999). Here, implicit in the rhetoric surrounding success in sports (and what is offered as

[4] Billie Jean King (#12), Martina Navratilova (#22), Chris Evert (#33) and Jackie Joyner-Kersee (#36).
[5] Torvill & Dean's gold medal winning performance at the 1984 Olympic Winter Games (#10), Kerri Strug's vault at the 1996 Olympic Games (#14), Bonnie Blair's performance at the 1994 Games, becoming the first U.S. woman Olympian in any sport to win more than four gold medals (#20) and Joan Benoit's victory in the first Olympic marathon for women in 1984 (#26).
[6] (#69 Bonnie Blair, #64 Althea Gibson, #59 Billie Jean King) The top 50 included five more women - Chris Evert (#50), Wilma Rudolph (#41), Jackie Joyner-Kersee (#23), Martina Navratilova (#17) and Babe Didrikson Zaharias (#10).
(Information for footnotes 4-6 retrieved from WSI, 2003)

relevant sports literacy from the past century) are the specified, traditional roles and activities for girls/ women (non-athletic) versus boys/ men (highly athletic).

The gendered rhetoric and roles in sports resonate with Foucault's emphasis of the regulation of gender via institutions. Importantly, Foucault does not approach these ideas through a model of top-down ideological transmission; rather, communities (and here, I would use gendered communities) participate, both being complicit in their own regulation through the forms of representation, codes, conventions, and habits of language that produce meanings. Eventually, these codes and habits of language are internalized, becoming what Foucault describes as "technologies of the self" (Foucault and Gordon 1980). In the behaviors of the men and the women participating in the sport-media-commercial complex, these technologies of the self subsist to the point that women are naturalized as being outside of sports, sports literacy, sports rhetoric, and the qualities and values associated with sports. The world of sports remains, then, as unnatural and/or unintended for women, and in order to *remain* a "woman," a woman must continue to remain outside this world despite its cultural and economic importance.

In the sport-media-commercial complex , this regulation and internalization of gendered roles also clearly emerge beyond unequal coverage and recognition. When women in sports *are* covered, they are Othered, often through infantilization or sexualization, through sports rhetoric in the sports coverage (Messner, et al 1993). If women *do* penetrate the world of sports in ways similar to male athletes, they are marked as less feminine and/or homosexual, creating the common fear that women's intrusion into the masculine realm of sports is associated with lesbianism (1997), or that they must

insist on their own femininity (and therefore Other themselves from male athletes/traditional high profile athletes) in order to still be considered a "woman" (1997).

Thus, we see women, too, contribute to the binary between an athlete and a woman, often through the ways they portray *themselves* amidst sports rhetoric in various publications. For example, in 1989, the Northwestern Louisiana State University women's basketball team appeared in basketball uniforms, rabbit ears, and fluffy tails on the cover on the university's yearbook, above the title, "These Girls Can Play, Boy" (1997). In an Avon commercial in the last decade, Jackie Joyner Kersee is shown running on a beach (while the camera focuses noticeably on her buttocks and breasts), while in a voice over, she tells us that she can bench-press 150 pounds and jump farther than "all but 128 men" in the world. Her last statement, and clearly the punchline of the advertisement, follows: "And I have red toenails." Words flash on the screen: "Just another Avon lady"(Women's Sports Foundation, 2001). Christy Martin, the first female boxer to ever fight in prime time, wears pink shorts and trumpets that she is a woman first, a boxer second (1997). Tennis player Anna Kournikova repeatedly appears as a sex icon in media coverage, including Canon camera commercials in which, after serving a few times, she pulls up her tennis skirt in order to pull a camera out of a sporty garter; the commercial ends as she takes a picture of the balls she has hit into the chain link fence at the end of the court (they read "Anna was here"); these promotions do not help challenge the continual comments made about Kournikova's appearance, including continual "leering jokes" about her physical appearance in Messner and Duncan's study (2000).

In these ways, the power of masculine sports rhetoric has regulated, and continues to regulate, sports in such a way that positions women or makes women

position themselves as Others. Women remain intruders to the language, values, and identities of sports, as secondary figures, sexy additions, or anomalies to sports, and overall as different than what we understand are top, high profile "athletes." If women are as such intruders, then they remain foreign to the literacy and rhetoric of sports, with men continually indirectly or directly dictating what qualities a woman may have as an athlete. As such, the sphere of sports excludes women through a cycle of contributors, including the assumption and/or actuality and continuance of sports illiteracy, a lack of sports rhetoric, and the continued male dominance and control of the sport-commercial-media complex [7]. These trends recreate gender distinction in sports continuously, despite increased actual *participation* for women in sports in post-Title IX years.

Finally, important to the idea that sports literacy engenders sports rhetoric, I want to re-highlight that the values and ideology of sports parallel those of capitalism: common U.S. sports rhetoric largely parallels U.S. capitalist rhetoric. These parallels mean that ways that men may signal and be associated with the privileged qualities of initiative, competitiveness, and aggressiveness through sports rhetoric are not available in the same way to women, and these qualities which are rarely associated with female athletes are conflated with those qualities that create the contemporary ideal worker/citizen. As such, sports rhetoric may contribute to women's continued exclusion

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[7] Another important dimension of the sport-media-commercial complex, though it will specifically be addressed in this paper, are solely the images (not directly connected to language) generated in popular sports media. Some brief examples include: in all of 2001, the Dallas Cowboy Cheerleaders were the only women on the cover of the #1 sports magazine *Sports Illustrated*. (Women's Sports Foundation research, 1996-2001) In 2002, women appeared on three *Sports Illustrated* covers of 53; the first was the swimsuit issue and another was the top sports colleges issue, which showed men and women college athletes. Sarah Hughes, Olympic figure skating gold medalist, was the only cover female athlete to have a featured article. (Women's Sports Foundation research, 2002)

from not only specific cultural capital, but also general profile of the ideal capitalist leader and worker, even in post-Title IX years. Ultimately, in this way, sports literacy engenders, and emerges through, a rhetoric that is both socially and economically powerful and exclusionary.

Title IX: The Gendering of Access to Sports and Sports Literacy

Another important place to look at sports literacy and rhetoric is actual Title IX legislation and discussion. In 1972, Title IX for the first time mandated that institutions offer equal opportunity and funding for sporting activities for females as they did for males[8]. An examination of Title IX reveals that the legislation does not account for or respond to the aforementioned complexities and issues surrounding the limit of access to the world of sports for women, or place women any closer to penetrating the sport-media-commercial complex in a significant way. Furthermore, an examination of the debates and recent backlash (namely, that women's sports are detracting from men's sports because the mandate for proportionate funding has ended some male teams for the sake of equal men's and women's teams at institutions) surrounding Title IX reveal that the invitation for participation in sports for women has *not* diminished the anxiety surrounding whether females can be considered "true or legitimate" athletes, nor the notion that females are an intrusion into this masculine sphere of sports. Ultimately, an examination of the debates surrounding Title IX reveals that it has not truly offered equal access to the privileged layers of sports participation, rhetoric, and literacy. Finally, post-

[8] U.S.C §§ 1681-1688 (1994), Title IX, a amended by the Civil Rights Restoration Act of 1987, mandates, *inter alia*, that all secondary schools, colleges, and universities receiving federal funding provide equal sports opportunities to men and women. Exceptions include single-sex institutions, military training, and beauty pageant competitions.

Title IX debates reinforce that a clear association with sports may be an important signifier of the sought-after qualities for productive leaders in a capitalist society – though not necessarily for women. In these ways, sports literacy and rhetoric helps maintain male control at the center of U.S. economic and cultural capital.

The language of Title IX directly acknowledges the importance of unlimited access to participation in sports; it states that "no person shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be subjected to discrimination under, or be *denied the benefits of* any educational program or activity receiving federal funding"(my emphasis). Though the United States following Title IX has seen a huge increase in numbers of female athletes in high schools and colleges[9], the enactment of legislation in order to allow women to compete in sports has been problematic in that it can (conveniently) suggest that the world of sports – and all of the "benefits of" penetrating that world – is equally open to women and men.

Prendergast (2003) explores events around and following *Brown v. Board of Education* legislation in order to suggest that in many ways, this legislation served to further establish academic literacy as the property of White Americans, through problematically normalizing a segregated society, avoiding racism as an explicit consideration in the case, and through working within a racist system to combat racism (Predergast 2003). In parallel ways, Title IX legislation has served to further establish sports, sports literacy, and sports rhetoric as the property of men, by failing on many

[9] The numbers of female sports participants (celebrated, for example, in the 1996 Olympic games in which a record number of women competed) more than doubled in the first school year following legislation; twenty-five years after the enactment of Title IX, over 2.5 million females participate in interscholastic sports, while there are 165,358 intercollegiate athletics participants. Yet these figures are interesting in comparison to boys' participation: in 1971 before legislation, 3.5 million boys competed in high school sports, higher than the number for girls over 25 years later; women now comprise roughly 36% of participants in U.S. organized athletics (Women's Sports Foundation, 2005).

levels, including: not accounting for the complexity and layers of the gendered nature of sports and gender socialization; by leaving sexism out of the equation; by being presented (and interpreted) as the answer for equal opportunity and *equality* between genders in the field of sports; by not extending to demands for equality of recreational and early sports participation; and by not demanding any equality of coverage or promotion for female and male sports. The enactment of Title IX as the answer for equality ignores the far more complex and unanswered social perceptions of women as *intruders* into the masculine sphere of sports and of women marked as an anomaly to the rhetoric of sports, and it has been charged not as changing the structures, policies, or practices at the majority of high schools and colleges but rather simply allowing women to join in (1997).

In her 1995 address regarding Title IX, Norma V. Cantu, Secretary of Civil Rights, espouses the psychological benefits of participating in sports, including such qualities as self-esteem and self-management. Specifically, Cantu describes that the capacity of women to assume employment opportunities will affect America's ability to compete in the world economy as well as American security and quality of life, and that women's ability to contribute to these employment opportunities has a direct relationship with their access to sports. Cantu stresses that the Federal commission who examined needed competencies – in order to determine if United States young people would be capable of meeting the demands of the workplace – found those qualities that "lie at the heart of job performance" were found also "as by-products of athletic participation" (Cantu 1995). Thus conflated with the necessities for economic individual and national

success, it is no surprise that sports lie at the center of social debates and anxieties and at the very core of U.S. popular media.

Along these lines, Walter Cronkite, touted as the "most trusted man in America" by several television networks, and one of the most successful news anchors and editors of the past century, suggested that sports participation is more necessary today than ever before due to its relationship with the qualities of a productive citizen. The following is a statement that Cronkite made before the National Football Foundation:

> The discipline of sports that teaches you to keep on trying even when the odds are against you has even more relevance amid our many persistent frustrations today. There's a place for the sporting discipline that trains you - under intense pressure - to keep cool and act with grace and courage. A sportsman's training may be more necessary than ever just to live in today's society. But, even more, the sports, man's courage, devotion, dedication and - most of all - the discipline of fair play are needed to nudge this world of ours a little for the better. (Cantu 1995)

Cronkite's qualification of courage as "man's" courage, and emphasis on discipline under intense pressure echo the qualities associated with those characteristics that form capitalist-worker assets as well as sports. These are, however, here distinctly that of a "sports*man*'s training." Furthermore, Cronkite importantly pushes his ideas even beyond that of survival and the economy – to moral ideology – when he suggests that these qualities of the sportsman will ultimately be able to make the world better.

I mention Cronkite here because, interestingly, Secretary of Civil Rights Cantu uses this quote by Cronkite in her 1995 address to suggest (following a reading of the

quote) that the "same is true for the sportswoman." Cantu's need to appropriate this language (and sphere) for women, under entirely different circumstances and for an entirely different audience nods to the privileging of the rhetoric and qualities associated with sports, and the need for women to attempt to adopt this (highly masculinized) rhetoric in order to compete with the status and qualities associated with them, or remain excluded from them. Cantu's use of Cronkite's speech, and the speech's goal as an insistence of Title IX's importance over 20 years after its incipience, also nod to the inability of women over time to change the powerful conception and qualities of sportsmanship to a rhetoric and sphere of sports*person*ship.

Thus, though sports continue to signal – and are perceived to foster – desired qualities of capitalist leaders and citizens, (and in this way are promoted as important for women), the world of sports continues to be something men largely define and women participate in only in limited and qualified ways. Female athletes can occasionally compete in traditionally-male sports, but they are still Othered by the rhetoric surrounding the sports – by themselves, by men, and by sports coverage writ large – so that their participation does not have to change the normative orders of the sport-media-commercial complex. Sports literacy and rhetoric can thus shape individuals, and in this case, tie an individual to or exile her from resources and qualities privileged as economic and cultural capital. These qualities and this knowledge fall under the masculine rhetoric and territory of the sports*man*, sports*man*ship, and the sportsman's initiative, confidence, and ability to compete on the field and in a capitalist society, and sports remain a masculine space even as they espouse the privileged, or even necessary, characteristics for the ideal U.S. citizen and worker.

Conclusion: Implications, Exceptions, and Continuing Research

Feminist scholars have argued that in the 20th century the institution of sport has provided men with a sphere of life through which they have bolstered the ideology of male superiority. Through the exclusion of women and the association of males with physical competence, strength, power, and even violence, sport has provided a basis through which men have sought to reconstitute an otherwise challenged masculine hegemony (Messner et al 1993). Messner, et. al (1993) argues that much of the continued salience of sport as an institutional site for the construction and legitimation of masculine power lies in its role as mass-mediated spectacle; this spectacle emerges as a hugely important cultural and economic venture through the sport-media-commercial complex (Messner 2000). While there has been a boom in female athletic participation, sports media has been very slow to reflect it, and sports participation has not changed the masculine nature of sports literacy and rhetoric that maintain the sport-media-commercial complex. Some ways that sports rhetoric preserves these orders include the infantilized and/or sexualized portrayal of women generated through sports coverage as well as the gross under-representation of women in sports announcers and coverage. Ultimately, these exclusionary practices are continuously reproduced through sports literacy as a masculine literacy, and its production, sports rhetoric, as a masculine rhetoric; sports literacy and rhetoric function in significant ways to maintain the status quo in ways that Title IX legislation has not responded to or changed.

Furthermore, sports and their surrounding rhetoric lie at the center of cultural and economic importance, demanding a need for close attention to the ways they socialize

gender and exclusion. A continued examination of who possesses and who regulates sports literacy offers a look at a powerful contemporary example in which a particular literacy can be socially reproductive along gender lines and is privileged and requires access. A continued examination can also explore whether those excluded have real opportunities to appropriate this literacy, and whether more time post-Title IX will allow for more appropriation/penetration of sports literacy and rhetoric by women in economically and culturally productive ways. As sports align with ideal citizen/worker initiative and leadership, the world of sports (namely, the sport-media-commercial complex) must be challenged in order to disrupt cultural and economic capital and privilege of sports as solely and rightfully male possessions.

There have, however, been some exceptions to this male dominance, namely in U.S. women's basketball. U.S. women's basketball has been incredibly important as it has placed women in the sphere of professional sports, and has provided female role models, Olympic participants and medallists, and coaches in the national sports arena. U.S. women's basketball should be examined for how it has begun to penetrate the world of U.S. sports, with a close look at whether it has become, perhaps, a sanctioned space, marked indefinitely as the WNBA, and as perhaps the – only – exception to male dominance in U.S. sports. Trends in sports in general (for example, the unsuccessful attempt to maintain a U.S. women's professional soccer league despite their World Cup success) and in women's basketball suggest that only when a women's team is in a high profile male sport and also consistently wins big can women be taken seriously in sports (many attribute the solidification and success of the WNBA with the University of Connecticut's women's basketball team consecutive wins in the 1990s), yet women's

basketball has also increased the number of women in sports recognition (most recently, for example, a crucial shot in overtime in the women's NCAA title game between Maryland and Duke made ESPN's Chris Bermans top ten plays of 2006). It is true that the 2004 NCAA championship game between UConn and Tennessee was the most-watched basketball game ever on ESPN, but this game was also watched as fans anticipated seeing the unprecedented achievement of UConn's winning two NCAA championships (men's and women's) on consecutive nights.

Ultimately, the trends and ideas in this paper suggest that each popular sports advertisement, game, purchase order, piece of coverage, conversation, or other type of sports exchange potentially recreates sports literacy and rhetoric, and the sphere of sports, as masculine. However, they also suggest that the normative world of sports can be challenged, and that the role of sports literacy and rhetoric offer spaces that, if disrupted, can help shape the culturally and economically valuable practices, values, and qualities of sports as the territory of the sportsperson.

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