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"I was a trailblazer": A phenomenological study of the baseball playing experience of girls

AJ Richard
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“I WAS A TRAILBLAZER”: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF
THE BASEBALL PLAYING EXPERIENCE OF GIRLS

An Abstract of a Thesis
Submitted
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

AJ Richard
University of Northern Iowa
December 2020
ABSTRACT

Baseball is a reflection of America (Briley, 1992). The game is immersed in traditions. Many of these traditions are gendered. Baseball is built on myth, and these myths have served the purpose of keeping baseball white, heterosexual, and male. Baseball is also characteristic of enduring inequalities and discrimination. Sixty years after Jackie Robinson integrated Major League Baseball, owners, managers, coaches, CEOs, and fans are still overwhelmingly white and male (Chang, 2017; Lapchick, 2019). Although the participation of girls in baseball can be traced back to the beginnings of the game, they have faced persistent opposition. According to Batts Maddox (2019), “Choosing to play baseball – not softball – disrupts dominant conceptions of acceptable feminine sporting activity,” (p. 9). Baseball is a way for boys and men to prove their masculinity. What does this mean for girls who play baseball? If baseball is emblematic of America, what does the exclusion of girls and women from the “national pastime” reveal about American culture? The purpose of this study was to discover the essence of the experience of girls playing the male-dominated game of baseball. Through these narratives four themes emerged: complexities and intersections of the different identities of girls, “otherness” as the only girl on the team; a small circle of support, and resiliency despite enormous pressure.
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This Study by: AJ Richard

Entitled: “I WAS A TRAILBLAZER”: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF

THE BASEBALL PLAYING EXPERIENCE OF GIRLS

has been approved as meeting the thesis requirement for the

Degree of Master of Arts

Date Dr. Kathleen G. Scholl, Chair, Thesis Committee

Date Dr. Jennifer J. Waldron, Thesis Committee Member

Date Dr. Anne C. Woodrick, Thesis Committee Member

Date Dr. Jennifer J. Waldron, Dean, Graduate College
DEDICATION

For Grandma, Mom, and Amy for not giving up on me.
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I would like to thank my committee chair, Dr. Kathleen Scholl, for encouraging, supporting, challenging, and guiding me in this work. Thank you for your patience, time, and tireless dedication to helping students learn.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Baseball is a reflection of America (Briley, 1992). The history of baseball in American proceeds the Civil War. Because of a long tradition and association with what it means to be American, there are elements of race, class, gender, and sexuality embedded in the game. Throughout 150 years of existence, baseball has been complicit in the reproduction and maintenance of inequalities (Alexander, 2013). In many ways, baseball is symptomatic of the problems afflicting America. Many of baseball’s beloved traditions reflect the inequality and discrimination endemic in America. Traditions such as hazing new players by making them carry a pink backpack, tomahawk chops, and bat boys are steeped in gendered, racist, and homophobic connotations. Baseball is also myth as exemplified in the poem “Casey at the Bat” and the invention of Abner Doubleday as the founder of the game. These myths have served the purpose of keeping baseball white, heterosexual, and male.

Accordingly, baseball can be interpreted as a symbol of enduring inequalities and discrimination. Sixty years after Jackie Robinson integrated Major League Baseball, owners, managers, coaches, CEOs, and fans are still overwhelmingly white (Chang, 2017; Lapchick, 2019). Although the participation of girls in baseball can be traced back to the beginnings of the game, they have faced persistent opposition. According to Batts Maddox (2019), “Choosing to play baseball – not softball – disrupts dominant conceptions of acceptable feminine sporting activity,” (p. 9). Baseball is a way for boys and men to prove their masculinity. What does this mean for girls who play baseball? If
baseball is emblematic of the “national pastime,” what does the exclusion of girls and women from baseball reveal about American culture?

The purpose of this study was to discover the essence of the experience of girls playing the male-dominated game of baseball. Over 100,000 American girls play youth baseball (Baseball for All, 2020). By high school, less than 2,000 girls are still playing the game (National Federation of State High School Associations, 2018). By age 18, 98% of girls who play baseball have stopped playing. Why do so many girls cease participation in baseball? What does playing baseball mean to girls?

Henderson (1996) found the meanings women ascribed to their leisure pursuits could be contradictory for different groups of individuals. A Black girl who grows up in a working-class family in an urban area will likely have fewer opportunities than a white girl who grows up with a professional, suburban family. The effects of race, class, sexuality, and gender can have a cumulative impact. Girls and women may glean multiple and differing meanings from these experiences which leads to multiple and contradictory meanings within discourse (O’Shaughnessy & Krogman, 2012). The term “tomboy” can be used with pride by one girl and simultaneously considered an insult by a different girl. This necessitates looking deeper into different aspects of the lives of girls. The shared experience of playing the “boys” game of baseball as girls is one aspect that deserves more consideration in research.

One common experience is the taunt, “You throw like a girl.” It is one of the most often repeated lines in the popular family-oriented baseball film, *The Sandlot* (Evans, 1993). Researchers have found stereotype threats such as, “You throw like a girl,” are
connected with women performing poorly when engaging in sports tasks (Hively & El-Alayli, 2013). Stereotype threat occurs when expectations preexist that an individual will not perform well at a task due to their group identity (Ray, 2019). Stereotype threat confirms bias. In a study of preschool age children, Robinson (2010) found girls reported lower perceptions of physical competence and lower motor skills than boys. In the study, girls seemed unfamiliar with equipment such as a bat and skills like sliding. Robinson (2010) theorized the differences could be attributed to environment, context, and sociocultural reasons. These factors are greatly influenced by gender at a young age and are not biological.

At an early age boys and girls receive clear messages delineating suitable activity choices based on gender. Girls are encouraged to be nurturing and boys to be athletic. Dolls encourage the expression of nurturing play. Balls encourage the expression of physical and competitive play. Adults including parents and educators tend to devote more time to teaching boys physical skills (e.g. how to grip a ball) compared to girls. These actions have a cumulative effect and are consequential. Perceived difference in the throwing style and ability, of boys and girls, is likely due to gender socialization not biological limitations.

Not long ago, racial segregation was strictly enforced in baseball and many people took for granted that white ballplayers were genetically superior athletes (Travers, 2009). Gender is increasingly viewed as something that is fluid and cultural as opposed to unchanging and natural. Hubbard (1990) wrote, “Women’s biology is a social construct and a political concept, not a scientific one” (1990, p. 119). Scientific research to
determine if there are biological sex differences is fraught with challenges. It is difficult
to completely eradicate preconceived bias from scientific inquiries into “sex differences.”
Such bias must be eliminated to obtain results which are not contaminated by culture.
And, the very nature of research into “sex differences” presumes the existence of
differences. Because gender, like race, is a social construct, the coercive segregation of
sport by binary gender has been questioned and condemned by scholars as a key
contributing factor in the reproduction of gender inequality (McDonagh & Pappano,
2008; Milner & Braddock, 2016; Travers, 2013). Scholars have also questioned if
segregation in sport, like racial segregation, will always be unequal (Milner & Braddock,
2016). Young (1980) described the results of girls and boys being treated differently:

There is a specific positive style of feminine body comportment and movement,
which is learned as the girl comes to understand that she is a girl. The young girl
acquires many subtle habits of feminine body comportment—walking like a girl,
tilting her head like a girl, standing and sitting like a girl, gesturing like a girl, and
so on. The girl learns to actively hamper her movements. She is told that she must
be careful not to get hurt, not to get dirty, not to tear her clothes, that the things
she desires to do are dangerous for her. Thus she develops a bodily timidity which
increases with age. In assuming herself as a girl, she takes herself up as fragile (p.
153).

Fragility is a highly undesirable trait in athletes. The presumption a girl athlete will
“throw like a girl” has consequences for girls. Girls playing sport have to prove
stereotypes wrong especially in a sport gender stereotyped as being for boys. Little
Leaguer, Kate Brownell, was the only girl playing in her upstate New York league
(Winters, 2005). Her mother reported she endured teasing throughout the season
including the taunt that she should have stuck to softball. At age 11, Brownell became the
first girl or boy to throw a perfect game in the history of the league. Did she feel pressure to prove the stereotypes wrong?

Social media provides a platform for parents and girls like Brownell to share their stories and connect. Jason Klein signed his daughter up for a second year of Little League Baseball (Bogage, 2018). She asked, “Isn’t baseball really for boys?” Klein turned to Twitter and asked people to show his daughter that girls play baseball too. Thirty thousand people retweeted his message. Over 40,000 people “liked” the tweet. The story clearly resonated with many.

In recent years there has been an increase in the number of girls playing baseball in high school. According to the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS), the number of girls playing high school baseball increased from 1,066 in the 2013-2014 season to 1,762 in the 2017-2018 season. With more girls playing baseball, it is important to understand the baseball playing experience of girls. With greater understanding, baseball coaches, league administrators, youth workers, parents, and educators can empower these girls who are playing a sport that may not conform to gender norms. Increased awareness may help practitioners to recognize constraints girls who play baseball may experience in order to empower them. The gendered nature of sport organizations influences the experience of girls playing baseball. By contesting the boundaries of typical discourse, girls and women in baseball demonstrate agency.

**Research Questions**

1. What meanings do adults who played baseball as girls ascribe to their experience?
2. Do girls playing baseball consider softball an “equivalent” sport?
Definitions of Terms

Essentialism: The belief that social group identities are fixed and universal, unchanging over time, and apply in different contexts. In regards to gender, it is the belief that there is an unchanging essence that signifies what it is to be a man or a woman (Krane, 2019, p. 241-242).

Gender: Cultural construct that includes behaviors, social roles, and attitudes that are ascribed as masculine or feminine in characteristics. (Krane, 2019, p. 242).

Gender binary: Belief system that only acknowledges two oppositional gender groups (feminine and masculine) (Krane, 2019, p. 242). The terms “gender” and “sex” are often conflated. They are not synonymous.

Hegemonic femininity: A socially constructed and privileged form of femininity which is held up as the cultural ideal. This includes being passive, compassionate, gentle, graceful, cooperative, and emotional. It is a component of a privileged, hierarchical system in which this form of femininity is privileged above other expressions of femininity. It is grounded in white, heterosexual, middle class values (Connell, 2005).

Hegemonic masculinity: A socially constructed and privileged form of masculinity which is held up as the cultural ideal. This includes strength, independence, stoicism, aggression, competitiveness, and athleticism. It is a component of a privileged, hierarchical system in which this expression of masculinity is favored above other expressions of masculinity. It is grounded in white, heterosexual, middle class values (Connell, 2005).
Intersectionality: A theory resulting from Black feminist scholarship which explains the ways multiple forms of oppression are interconnected (Crenshaw, 1991; Hill Collins, 1991). In particular, it describes how racism, sexism, classism, ableism, heteronormativity, and transphobia impact the lives and opportunities of individuals and groups of people.
CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Scant research has focused on the contemporary experiences of girls and women in baseball rendering them invisible. The literature review will reveal pertinent information to understand the experiences of girls playing baseball. The first section examines the historical context of girls in baseball. The next section investigates essentialism and gender construction which will lead into information about intersectionalities, structures, and resistance. Next, gender segregated sports will be examined including the manner in which culture and media condition people, whether softball is “girls” baseball, relevant policies and laws, and re-envisioning the categorization of sports. The final section is an overview of existing development structures for girls who play baseball. The literature review sets the foundation for the primary purpose of this study, which is to discover the essence of the experience of girls playing the male-dominated game of baseball. The background information will establish the context of these experiences.

Historical Overview

This section will explore the history of girls and women playing baseball within the context of different time periods. Historical context is essential to understand the baseball playing experiences of American girls.

The Early Days

In the 19th and 20th centuries, girls and women were coercively limited in society. Women were deemed biologically weaker than men (Dowling, 2000). Middle-and-upper
class women were advised to take the resting cure for a wide range of ailments including headaches, menstrual cramps, depression, and anxiety. The resting cure restrictions included prohibitions against reading because it was considered too much of a strain for the fragile constitutions of ailing women. It is likely that discouraging women from being physically active actually increased their health complications and physical weakness.

The resting cure prohibitions against physical activity included sport which was stigmatized as masculinizing for women. Doctors cautioned too much physical strain could result in reproductive dysfunction, and it was feared this could lead to the decline of the white race or “race suicide” (Cahn, 2015; Dowling, 2000). This fear was fed by declining birth rates among upper-class, Anglo Saxon Protestants in the early 20th century (Cahn, 2015). The restrictive corsets and long skirts of the time period had the effect of further prohibiting physical activity (Dowling, 2000).

The coerced fragility of women had additional connotations based on race and class. The expectation of fragility was reserved for women who were middle or upper-class and white. Working women and Black women rarely had the luxury of leisure time to disengage from an endless cycle of physical labor (Cahn, 2015). Working women were disqualified from being proper “ladies” because they were considered rough, unruly, and uncouth. A distinct line existed between “ladies” of the leisure class and unrefined women of the working class. Middle-and-upper class girls/women were more likely to have the money and free time to pursue greater recreational opportunities. “Lady” was a privileged term typically applied to upper-class, white women.
Binaries became further entrenched with the muscular Christianity movement of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. In this movement, an image of Jesus with bulging muscles became common (Dowling, 2000). The movement’s Christian soldiers saw themselves as created in this male, white, muscular image. The movement was embraced by rich and powerful white men. Future president Theodore Roosevelt grew up in a home where the muscular Christian philosophy was embraced (Elias, 2010). White, upper-class men began lifting weights to bulk up. This necessitated the resources to obtain exercise equipment. It also necessitated the free time to use the equipment. The bulkier physique sent the message men were stronger and dominant over women. The muscular Christian movement was perpetuated by organizations such as the Young Men’s Christian Association. The connection between sport, manliness, and military power reached a zenith when the YMCA was paid to provide sport for the U.S. military during WWI. Sport was a way for men to flex their masculinity and mastery over sin (Dowling, 2000; Elias, 2010). And, baseball was considered a remedy for the feminization of men (Elias, 2010). Sports such as baseball were manly pursuits. In this time period, women who pursued sports were considered too manly and suspected of being lesbian.

Despite the gradual acceptance of female athletes, sport remained the domain of males who were deemed naturally aggressive, competitive, and strong. Leaders such as President Theodore Roosevelt, and physical education reformer, Luther Gulick, promoted sport and strenuous activity as cures for the “crisis of masculinity” afflicting men in the Industrial Age (Dowling, 2000; Roessner, 2013). During the Industrial Age, men moved from laboring outdoors in fields to working indoors in offices and factories in dense
urban areas (Hastings Ardell, 2005; Ring, 2009a). The upheaval caused by these shifts caused many Americans to panic. Traditional social customs were in a state of flux. For working class men, sports such as baseball became healthy outlets for excess energy and discouraged what was considered delinquent, immoral behavior (Cahn, 2015). Baseball was perceived to have additional advantages in American society.

In some ways, baseball was an equalizer. The game groomed boys of different social classes to be poised, well-mannered, and competitive Americans. Through baseball, recent European immigrant men could assimilate into white, middle-class America (Ring, 2009a). Assimilation required that men lean and adopt a specific, dominant type of masculinity which corresponded with hegemonic masculinity. In fact, baseball was actively promoted as a way for boys to become men. Early 20th century Western novelist Zane Grey, asserted, “All boys love baseball. If they don’t, they’re not real boys,” (Elias, 2010, p. 14). Hegemonic masculinity, militarism, and baseball have long been intertwined.

The popularity of baseball spread during the Civil War (Elias, 2010). Baseball emerged as the “national game.” And, the founding fathers of the game intentionally excluded females (Ring, 2009b). Baseball pioneer Albert Spalding declared, “Baseball is too strenuous for womankind,” (Spalding, 1911, p. 11). Hall of Famer Ty Cobb described baseball as a game for “red-blooded men” (Cobb & Stump, 1993, p. 280). To Cobb, the baseball diamond was no place for “mollycoddles” because it was a struggle for nothing less than supremacy. Both Spalding and Cobb equated baseball with war (Elias, 2010;
Spalding, 1911). The pitcher and catcher combination are still known as the battery. The construction of baseball as a hegemonic masculine venue was intentional.

Spalding (1911) declared baseball was a uniquely American, masculine game. He orchestrated the committee that formally established the “Doubleday Myth.” The myth declared baseball was invented by Abner Doubleday, a white, American, masculine, Civil War general (Elias, 2010; Ring, 2009b). The Doubleday Myth intentionally omitted the evolution of baseball from the English games of rounders which was played by boys and girls (Ring, 2009b; Schiff, 2008). Through this mythic origin story, Spaulding firmly rooted baseball in the American psyche as the American game for boys, not for girls (Ring, 2009b). By using patriarchal and imperialist ideology, the myth reinforced the belief that the American, white, heterosexual middle-class was the ideal.

The presumed masculinity of baseball has served as justification for the forceful resistance to the participation of girls and women in the game (Travers, 2013). Spaulding, a sporting goods businessman, was also instrumental in transforming the game into big business (Ring, 2009b). This solidified the domination of the game by capitalist endeavors and resulted in coinciding ideologies of white supremacy, sexism, classism, and heteronormativity deeply ingrained in the sport.

The context of the opposition girls and women faced in baseball is evidenced in sport media from the time period. In the late 19th century, women were allowed to attend baseball games, but not to play (Roessner, 2013). Despite Victorian standards of proper feminine behavior, some girls and women did play baseball. Women played baseball as members of the Vassar College Resolutes team in 1866 (Ring, 2009a). Shattuck (1992)
documented the existence of women’s baseball teams at Smith and Mount Holyoke colleges in the late 19th century. The Dolly Vardens were a professional team of Black women baseball players known to have played prior to 1883 (Heaphy & May, 2006). By the end of the 1800’s, Maud Nelson was touring the country as a professional player, scout, manager, and team owner of Bloomer Girls baseball teams. Bloomer Girl teams barnstormed the country for decades and often played all-men’s teams (Shattuck, 2017).

In the 1880s, Harry H. Freeman assembled several traveling women’s baseball teams (Cahn, 2015). One such enterprise in Cuba ended with rumors the women baseball players were involved in inappropriate sexual activities. Any behavior deemed unfeminine could result in accusations of prostitution. This was the most humiliating charge that could be leveled against a Victorian era woman. Women participating in baseball were subject to intensified surveillance and concomitant punishments for violating the norms. In 1883, The Sporting Life editor, Francis Richter, wrote of “female base ballers” as being “a positive disgrace” (Roessner, 2013, p. 134). Women who played the sport faced backlash, silence, and skepticism of their abilities. Women who did not defy these gender norms were “ladies.” Women who did defy these gender norms were “tramps.” There was no middle ground, however, gradually some progress occurred.

**Sport for Girls and Women**

At the beginning of the 20th century, some physical educators and health professionals began to advocate for girls and women to engage in physical activity to improve their health and social skills (Cahn, 2015; McDonagh & Pappano, 2008). School age girls were increasingly allowed to engage in physical activities through settlement
houses, municipal playgrounds, schools, and organizations like the Young Women’s Christian Association. However, the view of sport as masculine persisted. Coinciding with these advances, an acceptable form of athleticism for girls and women was gradually developed. For instance, athletic girls could not be too masculine, too loud, or too rambunctious because this was not “lady like.” They could not threaten the status of boys and men. In other words, advocates for sport for girls could not upset the gender hierarchy and presumptions of male athletic superiority. This resulted in modified or “female” versions of sports and games.

The modified versions kept sport segregated by gender and maintained the gender hierarchy. The moderations for girls served to alleviate concerns that the participation of girls and women would lead to them engaging in sexually inappropriate behavior. Softball is an example of a modified version of a “boys” sport for girls. The outcomes of this were mixed. On one hand, girls and women gained freedom and improved health in their pursuit of physical activities. On the other hand, they were not allowed to deviate from norms of acceptable gender behavior. The behavior of physically active girls and women was policed by teachers, mentors and future employers (Cahn, 2015). Gender segregation of physical activities became normalized and entrenched in society. Furthermore, modified sports for girls preserved presumptions that gender differences are natural and fixed.

The game of softball was created by men in 1887 as a way to play baseball indoors during cold weather (Ring, 2009b). Softball was deemed more appropriate for women than baseball because of the larger ball, smaller field, underhand throwing style,
and shorter distances (Ring, 2009b). In 1929, Gladys E. Palmer, assistant professor of physical education at Ohio State University, wrote a book titled *Baseball for American Girls and Women*. The book actually described softball. Dr. Palmer (1929) listed four reasons why, “the national game as played by men is unsuited to girls and women”:

1. The intricate technic [sic] of the game is too difficult for the average girl to master.
2. The throwing distances are too great.
3. There is no advantage which cannot be enjoyed through participation in a more simple and well-planned, but less strenuous game based on the men’s game.
4. The danger of injuries is unnecessarily great with the use of the small, hard ball. (p. 6)

Palmer (1929) echoed rationale which was familiar to girls and women in baseball. Over time, this rationale became ingrained in practice and ideology. The case of Jackie Mitchell exemplifies this.

In 1931, a 17-year-old woman named Jackie Mitchell struck out Babe Ruth and Lou Gehrig in an exhibition game (Bucher, 2006). The rain delayed game had originally been scheduled for April Fools’ Day which added to the controversy. Almost 90 years later, baseball historians and fans still debate whether Mitchell’s strike outs of two of the most legendary players in baseball history was a publicity stunt or not. The consequences were real for Mitchell. After the game, baseball commissioner, Kennesaw Mountain Landis, banned women from baseball and nullified her contract with a minor league team. This limited additional opportunities for Mitchell after the event. The opportunities she did tended to have a carnival aspect which led to her retirement 23. Her accomplishments before and after were eclipsed by one game in which she was too good playing against men. Being dismissed as a novelty has been a recurring theme for women
in baseball. And, because girls and women who play baseball are exceptions, they are often exploited to generate publicity. For this reason, they have battled the stigma of not being taken seriously (Shattuck, 2017; Travers, 2009). Marketing that accentuated the “novelty” of the All-American girl playing baseball reached a crescendo during the 1940s and 1950s.

During WWII and the Korean War, the image of the All-American “girl” created a window of opportunity for women to play baseball professionally. The All-American Girls’ Professional Baseball League (AAGPBL) lasted from 1943-1954 (Fidler, 2006). With rare exception, only men officially coached which ensured their authority. The league provided a good income and other benefits for the women baseball players (Pierman, 2005). Twenty-five percent of the women who played in the AAGPBL earned a college degree compared to 8% of women of their generation. However, league rules reinforced hegemonic femininity. Women were recruited to the league based on both feminine appearance and skill. The required performance of femininity included playing in skirts that were not too short, wearing lipstick, abstaining from smoking and drinking in public, not using obscene language at any time, and wearing skirts as opposed to pants in public (All-American Girls Professional Baseball League, 2017). The league handbook included a section titled “Femininity with Skill,” (Cahn, 2015, p. 140). The AAGPBL contrasted femininity (fragility, passivity, gentleness) and athleticism (aggressiveness, power, strength). Non-hegemonic expressions of gender such as short hair or sexual behavior led to firing for some players (Cahn, 2015).
The AAGPBL became familiar to succeeding generations because a fictional account of the league was made into a popular film (Marshall, 1992). The 1992 film, *A League of Their Own*, is the highest grossing baseball movie of all time (Zaldivar, 2016). A brief scene in the film depicted a Black woman picking up an errant ball and throwing it back to an AAGPBL player with force. The scene is a subtle acknowledgement that the league was for white players only except for a few light-skinned Cuban women (Cahn, 2015; Fidler, 2006). By excluding Black women, the AAGPBL maintained the “All-American” or girl-next-door image. “All-American” translated into white, heterosexual, and middle class. Black women were excluded due to both race and gender.

Toni Stone, Mamie “Peanut” Johnson, and Connie Morgan were not allowed to play in the AAGPBL. Instead these women broke gender and race barriers by playing in the Negro Leagues with men in the 1950s (Davis, 2016). Mamie Johnson and a friend went to an AAGPBL tryout in Virginia (Pierman, 2005). However, they were the only women of color present and no one would speak to them or let them tryout. Playing in the Negro Leagues with men was challenging for these women. While touring in the South, Stone was sometimes referred to a local brothel for accommodations (Davis, 2016). Because she was the only woman who disembarked from a bus with a baseball team of men, some proprietors presumed she was a sex worker. According to Stone, the sex workers she lodged with showered her with adoration, cheered for her at games, gave her money, laundered her clothes, and made her an athletic bra. The accomplishments of Stone, Morgan, and Johnson have been diminished by scholars because they were signed
to play at a time when attendance at Negro League games was declining. Therefore, it is commonly presumed their signings were publicity stunts (Gregorich, 1993).

Another example of this conundrum occurred in the same time period. In 1952, the minor league Harrisburg Senators signed a woman, Eleanor Engle, to play professional baseball with and against men (Gregorich, 1993). Many considered the move a publicity stunt. This perception was lent credence because Engle had only played softball not baseball (Heaphy & May, 2006). The team manager declared that Engle would only play, “when hell freezes over,” (Gregorich, 1993, p. 172). Although she practiced with the team, she was not allowed to sit in the dugout during the game. Skepticism was fueled by the fact Engle’s uniform included shorts, unlike her male teammates. Two days after being signed, the minor league commissioner voided her contract. Soon after the MLB commissioner upheld the decision. In June 1952, twenty-one years after Jackie Mitchell, women were again banned from professional baseball.

**Little League Baseball and Softball**

Little League Baseball was created in 1939 and quickly became an important part of white, middle-class, American life in the postwar period (Little League Baseball, 2020). The league grew rapidly in the postwar period. Little League became a prominent institution for grooming boys to assume their place as leaders (McDonagh & Pappano, 2008; Ring, 2009a). In 1964, Congress officially recognized Little League Baseball for teaching “manhood” skills (McDonagh & Pappano, 2008). For decades Little League successfully impeded the efforts of girls to play the game. From 1970 to 1975, 57 law
suits were filed in 20 states challenging Little League and city league bans against girls playing the game. (Wiles, 2006).

In 1973, a lawsuit was filed against Little League by the National Organization for Women (NOW) on behalf of Maria Pepe (Ring, 2009a). Pepe was an 11-year-old girl in New Jersey who joined a Little League team with the permission of her parents and the coach (Goodman, 1989; McDonagh & Pappano, 2008). However, the league intervened and prohibited her from playing. In court, Little League argued baseball is a contact sport because Title IX of the Educational Amendments Act of 1972 excludes contact sports. Although this failed, Little League’s legal maneuverings to keep girls out of baseball were not over.

Little League’s lawyers argued the organization was private and not subject to anti-discrimination laws. The medical testimony on behalf of Little League was in accordance with essentialist beliefs that females are physically inferior to males. Little League’s doctors testified that the bones of girls were more fragile (McDonagh & Pappano, 2008). Medical professionals also testified if a girl was hit in the chest with a baseball, she was more likely to develop breast cancer later in life (Ring, 2009a). A doctor testified if a girl were struck in the face, she might become disfigured thus disrupting her chance of obtaining a future husband (McDonagh & Pappano, 2008). The emphasis on the possibility of girls getting hurt playing baseball belies that boys get hurt too. The protectionist reasoning has frequently been used to justify excluding girls and women.
The case culminated in late 1973, when a New Jersey Hearing Officer ruled that Little League Baseball was a public accommodation and specifically that girls were not physically inferior to boys (McDonagh & Pappano, 2008; Wiles, 2006). Although Little League lost the case, the league was not dissuaded from constructing barriers to keep girls out of baseball. In 1974 Little League in the state of New Jersey chose to end play for 2,000 teams rather than allow girls to play (Wiles, 2006). This decision left 150,000 boys without an opportunity to play baseball (Ring, 2009b). Little League sent a letter to 330 leagues in New Jersey urging them to use the media to make public appeals that the league was about to be destroyed by girls playing baseball. The organization requested a court order, and presented a petition with 50,000 signatures that requested a law to purposefully exclude girls (Goodman, 1989; Wiles, 2006). They argued before the state supreme court, that the lack of restrooms at facilities meant the league could not guarantee the privacy of girl baseball players. However, the New Jersey Superior Court upheld the verdict and ordered Little League to play and include girls. Little League faced additional lawsuits in other states. After fighting for decades, the organization publicly announced it would, “defer to the changing social climate,” (Wiles, 2006, p. 174). In 1974, President Gerald Ford officially changed the Little League congressional charter language from “boys” to “young people,” (Wiles, 2006).

It appeared, Little League’s efforts to preserve baseball as a boy-only domain had failed. However, the same year Little League was forced to allow girls to play baseball, the organization created Little League Softball. Girls were diverted away from baseball and encouraged to play softball (Berlage, 2000). To many, this move created separate and
unequal fields of play (Wiles, 2006). For instance, Ila Borders was told to come back a
different day to register (Borders & Hastings Ardell, 2017). When she returned, she was
told baseball registration was finished for the season. Girls were faced with a “choice.”
They could choose to be the only girl on a team or switch to softball and play with other
girls.

Some girls were told that if they stepped onto a Little League field violence could
result (Ring, 2009b). It would not be the first or the last time threats were used to
intimidate and deter the desegregation of baseball. Decades earlier Jackie Robinson
endured verbal abuse, death threats, scorn from his own teammates, and threats by
opposing players to go on strike (Hill, 2010; Swaine, 2012). Ila Borders, the first woman
to earn a scholarship to play college baseball, played in games where she was hit by
pitches every time she came up to bat (Borders & Hastings Ardell, 2017). For Borders, it
culminated in a physical attack by her own college baseball teammates. There have been
consequences when girls and women break the white male heterosexual hegemony in
baseball.

**Essentialism and Gender Construction**

Culture involves, “systems of meaning, knowledge, and action (Natasi et al.,
2017). Within groups of people, culture reflects shared beliefs, values, and behavioral
expectations. Culture construction is the definition of the self in relation to others (St.
Clair, 2008). It is the structure of society and includes social roles, policies and laws,
institutions, and organizations. Masculine and feminine hegemony are the result of
culture. This is significant because cultural beliefs give meaning to social organizations
and institutions such as baseball. A social construct is the definition of self within society. Gender is a consequential construct within society.

The social construction of gender is defined by the way people interact with each other. Despite being socially constructed as opposed to being biological, gender is taken for taken-for-granted to be true, natural, and unchanging. Gender includes behaviors, social roles, and attitudes that are ascribed as masculine or feminine. Gender expression is the manner in which people indicate their gender in the presentation of clothing, hair style, pronouns used, and other behaviors. Gender has been socially constructed as a rigid binary, oppositional, and contradictory. Within this construct, men are aggressive, competitive, and strong while women are gentle, passive, and fragile. The gender binary is so deeply embedded in the psyche of people that it takes conscious effort to think beyond the binary.

Although the terms sex and gender are often used interchangeably, they are not the same. According to Krane (2019), sex is a description of a person’s physical body which is based on anatomy, hormones, and chromosomes. Like gender, sex is typically categorized in binary terms which is problematic because not all individuals are easily categorized as male or female. Intersex bodies have biological characteristics that are male and female. The belief human bodies can only be categorized within a male/female binary is essentialist.

Essentialism is a constraining idea that people believe is natural. Krane (2019) defined essentialism as a belief that the social group identities of individuals are fixed and unchanging. Essentialism does not allow for the passage of time, fluidity, and different
contexts. The belief there is a universal essence which defines what it means to be female or male is essentialist. According to essentialism it is common sense that men are physically superior to women. Essentialist beliefs maintain and reinforce hegemonic masculinity. Gender norms convey essentialism. However, essentialism fails to account for different social and cultural conditioning based on gender or sex.

Mondschein et al. (2000) found mothers of 11-month old infants overestimated the crawling abilities of their sons and underestimated the crawling abilities of their daughters. Although there was no actual difference in crawling abilities between boys and girls, mothers unconsciously projected essentialist beliefs that male infants were more physically proficient than female infants. Therefore, essentialist beliefs condition and socialize people in the earliest stages of life.

In many ways, essentialism has been used to justify gender and sex inequality (Cooky, 2009). Essentialism takes for granted that boys and girls are oppositional and different. Presumed natural differences becomes a justification for different treatment. Since social constructs and essentialism are commonly accepted as natural, unchanging, and universal, this is typically unchallenged in daily life. These beliefs become unconsciously internalized and result in practices which maintain differential power and privilege in American society (Krane, Choi, Baird, Aimar & Kauer, 2004). The next section will explore the nature of oppression in regards to indemnities in addition to gender.
Intersections

Gender is just one social construct impacting girls playing baseball. Race, class, and sexuality are also social constructs. A girl’s race, sexuality, and class can deeply impact her opportunities and experiences. Individual girls are differently positioned within different economic, racial, and social contexts. A Black girl will not experience sexism the same as a white girl (Crenshaw, 1991). Therefore, the baseball playing experiences of different girls are not necessarily parallel due to differences in identity. According to Crenshaw (1991), discrimination based on race or gender become mutually reinforcing. It is necessary to connect these multiple layers to obtain a deeper, broader understanding. Systems of oppression and discrimination interlock through relationships between people.

An individual’s activity preference cannot be separated from social influences. Not all girls have the same opportunities. For instance, access to information about opportunities to participate in baseball involves privilege. Mainstream media channels do not reach all girls equally. Girls who have more resources (money, access to internet, access to existing programs, transportation, supportive parents, a culture that fosters interest in a sport) are more likely to pursue a sport. A girl of color living in a working-class neighborhood who must care for younger siblings after school does not have the same opportunities to play sport as a girl who is white and an only child living in the suburbs. Therefore, it is necessary to consider how girls and women are included within these structures (Cooky, 2009). In fact, discrimination can be so normalized in daily life that it does not occur to ordinary people that it is occurring.
Discrimination seems natural because the cultural constructs of race and gender are deeply ingrained in people. Therefore, making inequalities visible makes people uncomfortable. Privilege compounds the situation. People are averse to giving up any perceived advantages. For instance, the advancement of Black people is only tolerated when it is also beneficial to white people. In Critical Race Theory, this is known as interest convergence (Delgado et al., 2000). Taking this into consideration, gender barriers in baseball are unlikely to come down until those in charge see a benefit for themselves. For instance, MLB profited monetarily from dismantling segregation in professional baseball. In another example, MLB teams commonly have LGBTQ promotions to lure fans to games. MLB profits from selling tickets, concessions, and merchandise at these games. Yet, MLB remains so rigidly heteronormative that no MLB player has come out as gay during his career. Heterosexuality has been the only representation in MLB for over 150 years. Sexuality is one of the intersections with a good (heterosexual) versus bad (homosexual) binary.

Another intersection is the good woman - bad woman dichotomy persistent in culture (Hill Collins, 2004). Women who do not conform to dominant ideologies of sexuality are marginalized as bad women. Black women, working class women, and gender nonconforming women automatically have strikes against them because they do not conform to hegemonic femininity. Women and girls will seek to distance themselves from being considered “bad” by conforming to dominant social rules. Within this dichotomy, Black, working class, and gender nonconforming women are archetypal bad women.
In several ways, Effa Manley was an archetype “bad” woman. She was the wife of a Black man who became wealthy through illegal gambling or “running numbers” (Overmyer, 1998). She also fit the “bad” woman archetype because she was active in the Civil Rights Movement, therefore she was not docile and complacent. Manley, the only woman inducted into the National Baseball Hall of Fame, illustrates the complexities of intersections. She was co-owner of the Negro League Newark Eagles in the 1930s and 1940s (Alexander, 2013). At the time, it was extraordinary for a woman to be an executive in professional sports. There is controversy over whether she was Black or white. According to Alexander (2013), it is important to know that Manley navigated between Black and white racial definitions which indicates that race is fluid. Manley’s life defied the categorization of people into one racial group and the complexities of intersections. It is important to understand how intersections of discrimination are maintained within structures.

Structures

In the aftermath of George Floyd, the terms “structural,” “systemic,” and “institutional,” as they relate to discrimination, have become buzz words. It can be difficult to identify structural discrimination because of the complexity and insidious nature of it. Recognizing organizations as gender, racial, sexuality, and class social structures connected to resources can aid in understanding social phenomena. Ray’s (2019) theory of racialized organizations is an aid in facilitating this understanding.

Ray’s (2019) racialized organization theory can be extrapolated to gendered organizations like baseball. Sexism exists at three levels: individual (micro level),
organizational (meso level), and structural (macro level). The individual level is the most visible. On the other hand, organizations are often considered gender neutral. However, it is at this level that policies, rules, membership, and segregation firmly root discrimination. For instance, according to Ray (2019), the structural level is based on a system of rules and resources. Discriminatory structures are fueled by the control of resources. Resources include connections with other people (e.g. “old boys club”), status (e.g. Ivy League education), and knowledge (e.g. access to opportunities). Organizations are formed by people who pool such resources. These organizations can be the site of reproduction of discrimination or the site of disruption of discrimination. The Maria Pepe lawsuit against Little League Baseball is an example of disruption.

Individuals who disrupt contribute to changing discrimination because the stability of discriminatory structures depends on the compliance of individual people (Ray, 2019). Individuals who defy gender norms disrupt gendered structures through individual action. However, this may be less likely to occur in a team sport which requires submission of one’s individual self for the team. And, being the disrupter may involve a sense of isolation and otherness especially in a team environment. Although agency has limitations within powerful structures, it is important to consider the individual needs of youth participating within the structures of sport programs.

According to Rauscher and Cooky (2015), in order to truly meet the needs of diverse girls, sport programs must empower girls to see their lives within a broader context, give them tools to understand the sources of the discrimination they encounter, and mobilize girls to take social action on an individual and collective level. Offering a
girls’ sport program does not necessarily lead to equity. Focusing on the lives of individual girls can hide systems of inequality and privilege. In this way, the gender status quo is maintained.

Structures and agency intersect in social interactions and the perceptions of individuals within structures. Cooky (2009) found coaches were inclined to dismiss low participation rates among girls as lack of interest. However, Cooky (2009) determined low participation rates were connected to inequalities in scheduling, poor marketing, and lack of investment. Interest in sport is socially constructed by structures, agency, and culture. Simply asking a girl about her interest in sport does not take into consideration structural and cultural influences. Cooky (2009) advised it is useful to envision agency along a continuum with transformation and resistance at one end and reproduction of social structures at the other end. Creating more opportunities without addressing structure, agency and culture has not resulted in equality. The agency of participants, parents, coaches, officials, and other individuals within structures must interact in a manner that results in transformation as opposed to reproduction of inequality. A strategy that focuses solely on the inclusion of girls into male domains neglects to address systems of privilege and does nothing to change cultural practices. Inclusion alone is insufficient to address gender injustice (Travers, 2008).

Well-intentioned adults who lead programs without addressing the need for structural change can become cheerleaders who encourage unprepared girls to enter spaces that are hostile (M. L. Brown, 2001). Inclusion does not change a hostile or apathetic culture. Inclusion may be superficial and a sense of being othered may persist.
On the other hand, an opportunity to play on an all-girls’ team as the result of a collective social movement may have the potential to be collectively empowering and transformational.

Collective movements are an essential component of systemic change. One of the advantages of these movements is the potential to turn the negative view of constraints at an individual level into a positive position of empowerment that may change discriminatory systems (Henderson, 2013). This transformative approach creates opportunities for girls to get involved with social justice activities to promote social, cultural, and individual change (Rauscher & Cooky, 2015). An important part of a collective movement is learning to recognize discrimination to effectively counter it. Consciousness of individual, cultural, and social systems in everyday life is key. Empowering girls with tools and collective action enables them to overcome feelings of defeat. By working with feminist, racial justice, working-class, and LGBTQ+ organizations, youth sport programs can engage in changing discriminatory structures. Without this strategy, change may occur on the individual level but will not occur systemically. The development of a positive youth culture is essential.

Youth sport leagues are often designed in the performance model which emphasizes hard work, competition, intensity, winning, and aggression (Cooky, 2009). On the other hand, the participation model places value on play, fun, connections, celebrating individual accomplishments, and competition with another person as opposed to against someone. Girls who demonstrate participation model values within a performance model structure may not be taken seriously since they are not interested in
winning at all costs. The participation model is more appealing to some girls and boys. However, the participation model does not conform with masculine hegemony in sport. In addition, girls who are the only girl on their team are unlikely to have the tools to affect a collective movement.

Disruption

One of the challenges facing girls who play baseball is they are often isolated. This makes collective action for social change difficult. Playing baseball might be personally empowering for one girl. Her experiences may imbue her with confidence and connections. It may be disempowering for a different girl who finds her confidence shaken and her competence challenged. She may be on the receiving end of hostility and bullying. Support circles and personality are important differentials. Other important social interaction factors include the influence of coaches, parents, peers, and siblings.

Individuals actions occur within patterns of social interactions between individuals. Social constructions like gender compel patterned behavior. One of these patterns is gender segregation of sport. Gender segregation of sport is largely coercive by nature. For the most part, it is imposed not freely chosen. Therefore, when a girl chooses to play a male-dominated sport it may be an act of resistance. Sport can be a place of resistance to oppression and a site of transformation (Kane, 1995; Theberge, 1991). To persist where one is not wanted may require ignoring transgressions and letting things go. It may be some girls leave baseball rather than continually fight to be included.
Gender Segregation in Sport

The segregation of sport according to the sex or gender binary is coercive not natural. An individual who breaks with these patterns runs the risk of being othered. Numerous scholars have argued gender and sex differences in sport performance can be attributed to social, political, economic, and psychological discrimination not biology (Burke, 1996; Butler, 1990; Fausto-Sterling, 2000; Pronger, 1990). Gender segregation contributes to gender hierarchies which result in gender inequity (Love & Kelly, 2011). Institutions utilize symbols and meanings which sanction these inequalities. Gender inequality is reified through the implication girls and women are inferior athletes compared to boys and men. Baseball compounds gender inequality because it recreates a systemic and institutionally-entrenched binary.

Batts Maddox (2019) described the processes which preserve the gender segregation of baseball as “sustained cultural conditioning and systemic exclusion,” (p. 3). This section will explore gender segregation in sport. First, the manner in which culture including media create and reproduce inequalities in sport will be examined. Next, the application of policies and laws will be investigated. Then softball as an equivalent sport will be considered. Finally, the development structure for girls playing baseball will be evaluated.

Separate is Not Equal in Culture and Media

American sports are a sacrosanct, mega-billion-dollar industry. The narrative of the underdog overcoming tremendous odds on the field of play has been enshrined in museums, books, film, and folklore. Holidays and traditions revolve around American
sports. One-third of Americans watch the ritual of the Super Bowl extravaganza (CBS Sports, 2018). The MLB All-Star Game and Home Run Derby signal the mid-point of summer. In 2018, 97 million Americans watched college basketball’s March Madness (National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2018). College football bowl games are synonymous with Christmas and New Year’s celebrations, and NFL games have become a Thanksgiving tradition. All of these sporting events are a public stage for the performance of hegemonic masculinity (Messner, 1992). MLB and other sport institutions celebrate and glorify a narrow definition of masculinity/heterosexuality which is always held in higher esteem than perceived femininity.

The domination of sports by men includes the media. The media sets the stage for how the public will consume issues of race, class, gender, and sexuality in sport. The framing is being executed by white men. Sports editors are 85% white and 90% male (Lapchick, 2018). Columnists are 76% white and 83% male. And, 95% of television anchors, co-anchors, and analysts are men (Cooky et al., 2015). Play-by-play announcers and color commentators of televised sports are almost exclusively white males (Messner et al., 2000). The lack of representation has been likened to the “symbolic annihilation” of women (Cooky, 2006; Gerbner, 1978).

Weber and Carini (2012) analyzed *Sports Illustrated* covers for representation of female athletes. Female athletes were on 4.9% of *Sports Illustrated* covers from 2000-2011. This low percentage is not an improvement. Between 1954 and 1965 women athletes were featured on 12.6% of covers. Images and discussion about women athletes on the most watched sports networks range from 1.4% to 3% of all sports coverage
Limited media coverage of women’s sports sends a message that men’s sports are more important. The media determines what is newsworthy, and often justifies the inequity by arguing people do not want to watch women’s sports. However, when women’s sporting events are broadcast record numbers of viewers have tuned in to watch (Kane, 2013). Over four million people watched the women’s gold medal soccer match of the 2012 Olympic Games. In 1999, 94,000 people paid to watch the Women’s World Cup (soccer) at the Rose Bowl in-person (Heywood & Dworkin, 2003). The 2015 Women’s World Cup (soccer) set a record with 23 million viewers (U.S. Soccer, 2015).

When women’s sports are covered has been a difference in quality of coverage. In a 25-year longitudinal study, Musto et al. (2017) found the broadcasters of women’s sports had a tendency to be bland. During the course of the study, coverage of women’s sports shifted from overtly denigrating to ostensibly respectful but lackluster. Men’s sports were presented with more camera angles, more statistical information, better sound quality, entertaining special effects, and high-quality graphics (Bruce, 2015; Greer et al., 2009). Men’s sport coverage included reverence of the men’s athletic skill, rapid fire commentary, action language, vocal inflections, and the use of dominant words, (Musto et al., 2017). Women’s sports were broadcast in a matter-of-fact, literal, monotone style which Musto et al. (2017) referred to as “gender-bland.”
For instance, broadcasters of a men’s game exclaimed, “Wow, that’s a real brick!” and, “wicked victory,” (Musto et al., 2017, p. 585). Broadcasters described the dominant performance of a woman athlete as “wins easily.” Commentators of men’s basketball lavished praise on the skills of players as “perfect,” “beautiful,” and “amazing.” The broadcasters of a women’s basketball game simply said, “good basketball.” Featured stories about men’s sports were much longer than stories about women’s sports. The segments on men’s sports featured live game action while segments on women’s sport often depicted women on the bench in a supporting role for their teammates. Male athletes were rarely asked about personal relationships. In contrast, the role of women athletes as mothers, wives, and girlfriends was frequently the focus. This frames male athletes as dominant and individual. Women athletes were framed within their interpersonal roles. This positions men’s sports as exciting and fun while positioning women’s sports as insipid without enthusiasm. This legitimized the poor coverage of women’s sports. “Gender-bland sexism provides a framework that structures how we think, see, and feel about women,” (Musto et al., 2017, p. 592). This includes sexual objectification which is marginalizing.

Women athletes are persistently sexually objectified (Kim & Sagas, 2014; Messner & Montez De Oca, 2005). The sexual objectification of women athletes minimizes their athletic skills. Women athletes are marketed as objects of heterosexual male desire which places the emphasis on their appearance not their skill. Women athletes are also marginalized when broadcasters present them in a dull, uninspiring context. Gender-bland coverage appears to be inclusive. It is inconspicuous which makes
it more challenging to counter. The lack of media coverage and poor quality of media coverage are examples of structural discrimination. Sexism has morphed into different, more elusive forms. The progression of limited inclusion does not reflect authentic inclusion or equity. This has measurable ramifications.

Of the 100 top paid athletes in the world, only two are women (Forbes, 2020). Tennis player Naomi Osaka ranked #29 and Serena Williams ranked #33. This sends a message that women athletes are not valued. Girls and boys see few women playing professional sport and typically never see women playing baseball. Boys and girls do not see anything approximating equal renumeration for athletic skill. Women athletes who are white, feminine, heterosexual, and well behaved are the ideal. Segregation of sport reinforces hegemony and related injustices.

According to Travers (2008) gender segregation and male-dominated sports constitute a nexus of gender injustice. Travers (2008) defined “gender injustice” as, “the cultural and material devaluation of women and gender transgressors,” (p. 81). The nexus is sustained by economic and cultural factors. In America, sport is a powerful industry with vast resources. Occupations in the sport industry are largely segregated by gender. Women in the industry work primarily in traditional pink color jobs not in operations (Lapchick, 2019). This puts capital, control, and decisions into the hands of mostly white men and perpetuates a masculine hegemonic culture. In these settings the athletes are men. The decision makers are men. The addition of a few women in some non-traditional jobs does not eliminate structural inequalities. The bulk of resources remain in the purview of men. This reinforces the binary along with concomitant homophobia, racism,
classism, and sexism. The culture and manner of doing things remains fundamentally unchanged. The binary is maintained and threat minimized.

Gender injustice is insidious at all levels of sport. In youth sports, adults (coaches, parents, officials) reinforce gender stereotypes (Minikel-Lacocque, 2020). Young athletes are conditioned to internalize these and act based on these limiting, essentialist ideologies. Previous research indicates youth sport coaches treat boys and girls differently (Landers, 1996; Messner, 2000). Landers (1996) observed a tee ball coach intentionally mishandling the ball and saying to the kindergarten aged girl and boy players, “I’m a little girl. I can’t catch a ball,” (p. 91). In the study, boys were taken seriously and instructed. Girls were ignored, undermined, and even disciplined for not being focused enough. A girl did a cartwheel on the field and was punished. A boy engaging in the same behavior did not receive admonishment or punishment. Messner (2000) observed 4 and 5-year old soccer players activate and enforce gender boundaries. In the study adults and youth created and disrupted essentialism.

Gender transgressors challenge the boundaries of hegemony. A girl who performs gender in a manner consistent with feminine hegemony is privileged compared to a girl who does not conform (Minikel-Lacocque, 2020). Failure to conform results in sanctions. One of the ways adults and peers do this is through gender policing. Gender policing involves, “social and cultural pressures that enforce normative gender expression,” (Krane, 2019). The structure of sport according to binary gender categories results in gender policing and erasing gender non conformers (Minikel-Lacocque, 2020).
Another form of erasing, dismissing, or challenging the athletic prowess of girls and women is to challenge the individual’s gender. Afterall, a woman who can run a marathon faster than over 4,000 men cannot be normal (Kane, 1995). This leads to suspicion and even gender verification tests in some cases. Minikel-Lacocque (2020) found 10 to 12-year-old girls who had short hair and were skilled soccer players were subjected to intense gender policing. These girls encountered adults who demanded to see birth certificates proving their gender. Some adults confronted these young girls face-to-face. A girl cannot be too good at a sport and still be a girl. They myth of meritocracy prevails in gender segregated sport.

According to Alexander (2013), “neither sport nor the justice system have ever been based solely on merit,” (p. 10). People like to believe that the best athlete will emerge victorious. However, the playing field has never been level. Gender is a credential for boys. A girl may believe she has to ask for permission to try out for a baseball team. A boy will be allowed to try out for a baseball team regardless of prior experience or ability. The most unathletic boy will not be questioned until he is unable to demonstrate skill. The credential of gender automatically leads to inclusion for boys in sport. Recreation leagues often gender mark programs as “boys’ baseball” and “girls’ softball.” Binary gender segregation reinforces hegemonic culture in sport.

Members of all-male teams are trained to suppress their emotions because the display of emotions is viewed as feminine. Homophobia and misogyny are promoted by disparaging traits perceived as feminine (Anderson, 2008). Boys who are not athletic are mocked for being “sissies” and “pussies.” Both words have feminine origins and
deprecate femininity. In sports including baseball, being a girl or woman is the equivalent of weakness and frailty. The reproduction of stereotypical behaviors, traits, rituals, and beliefs harms boys as much as it harms girls. Unathletic boys who do conform to hegemonic masculinity face the stigma of presumed homosexuality. Athletic girls who violate hegemonic femininity also experience homophobic stigma (Travers, 2013; Harrison & Secarea, 2010).

The problem of male-only sport spaces that are homophobic was exemplified in August 2020 when Cincinnati Reds broadcaster, Thom Brennaman, made a homophobic remark live on-air (Mitchell, 2020). Brennaman was suspended. He apologized and the Reds issued a statement:

In no way does this incident represent our players, coaches, organization, or our fans. We share our sincerest apologies to the LGBTQ+ community in Cincinnati, Kansas City, all across this country, and beyond.

However, Brennaman’s remark is reflective of a masculine hegemonic culture where such comments are normalized. His mistake was broadcasting the comment to the public. This culture is part of a structure of injustice.

Gender injustice is status quo. Within this status quo, the events most highly valued as evidenced in media coverage, marketing, and funding have rules, strategies, and cultures that privilege men’s bodies (Messner et al., 2000). The characteristics typically valued in sports such as size, strength, and power are analogous with hegemonic masculinity. Gender segregation of sport insulates boys from being challenged by girls. In this way, boys are protected, not girls. Girls and women are eliminated as direct
competitors for funding, media attention, multi-million-dollar contracts, sponsorship, and prestige. The consequences of this are extensive.

Anderson (2008) found exclusive male domains in sport limits contact between men and women which creates a culture that reproduces limiting stereotypes of women as fragile, passive, sexual objects. Anderson (2008) studied the attitudes of men who played football in high school towards women after the same men became cheerleaders in college. These men professed having misogynist, sexist, anti-feminist views of women when they played high school football. They did not see women as capable athletes or friends. The men in the study did not make the cut in college football. To be as close to the game as possible, they became cheerleaders. As part of a competitive cheerleading team with women as teammates their views changed dramatically. By engaging in athletic competition side-by-side with women, they grew to see women as accomplished athletes, strong leaders, and valued friends. Unfortunately, such coed opportunities in sport are rare. This constrains boy and girl athletes.

The potential of girls to develop as athletes is constrained in the interest of maintaining hegemonic ideologies of feminine bodies (Travers, 2008). The woman athlete threatens gender norms by being strong, aggressive, and competitive. This creates the female/athlete paradox (Krane, Choi, Baird, Aimar & Kauer, 2004). These women risk being portrayed as different from “normal” women. To avoid the stigma of being deviant, many women athletes present a hyper feminized image which conforms to hegemonic femininity (Cooky, 2006). Women who succeed in sports have to prove they are “real” women through mannerisms, dress, and expressions of hyper femininity (Kane,
The AAGPBL’s feminine code stipulating skirts, charm school, and lipstick is an example of coerced hyper femininity. Also, promotional photos of Negro League player Toni Stone depicted her applying powder to her face and washing windows (Davis, 2016). In her everyday life, Stone wore men’s clothes (Ackmann, 2010). Many girls and women athletes chose to wear pink, long hair, bows, make-up, jewelry, and feminine styled clothes. This enables them to escape being labeled lesbians (Krane, Choi, Baird, Aimar & Kauer, 2004).

Being too muscular is problematic for girl and women athletes seeking to preserve their feminine identity. The long-standing fear of the masculinization of women athletes is well documented (Cahn, 2015; Dowling, 2000; Heywood & Dworkin, 2003; Waldron, 2015). According to gender norms, lesbians are not true, biological women. This diminishes the athletic accomplishments of women as an anomaly or illegitimate.

Women athletes who are lesbian do not conform to binary norms of gender and sexuality. Women athletes who are muscular have faced backlash. In tennis, Venus Williams, Serena Williams, and Martina Navratilova experienced criticism for not looking “lady like.” During her successful Wimbledon campaign in 2015, Serena Williams was targeted by cyber bullies who said she, “looks like a man,” (Siebert, 2015). As successful athletes these women displayed aggressiveness which led to criticism for lacking warmth (Heywood & Dworkin, 2003). It’s a criticism not leveled at men athletes. For men, aggressive play marks them as superior athletes. Women athletes receive the message being feminine is more important than being an athlete (Pierman, 2005).
According to Hill Collins (2004), this intense media scrutiny of athletes, “operates as a morality play about American masculinity and race relations,” (p. 153). High-profile athletes experience intense surveillance of their bodies and behavior. If their bodies and behavior deviate from the white, middle-class, heterosexual gender binary, there are consequences. According to Hill Collins (2004) controlling images are images that depict gender, class, sexuality, and race in popular culture. These controlling images justify inequality and discrimination. Through deployment of controlling images, elite groups use their power to manipulate ideas. Controlling images make racism and sexism seem natural and inevitable.

Serena Williams upset this paradigm with her expression of anger and open criticism of male judges at the U.S. Open in 2018 and 2019. Many condemned Williams for being “disrespectful,” lacking “grace,” and lacking “class” (Murali, 2019). All terms which are connected to the dichotomy of women as either ladies or tramps, good or bad, with no in between. Such terms also signify racist ideology because there is a negative perception of Black women as angry, low class, uncouth, and animalistic. “Rage is no virtue for women; it is the provenance of men. Instead, we must be graceful,” (McFadden, 2018). To be an angry Black woman is to defy the expectation of subordination and to become a threat. Intersections and controlling images appear in other insidious ways.

The media reify harmful stereotypes and normalize the gender binary. Another way the media reinforces the gender binary is by normalizing the perception of gender differences by failing to assess binaries critically (Travers, 2009). For example, Travers
(2009) compared *The New York Times* coverage of Jackie Robinson’s integration of baseball with the same newspaper’s coverage of four contemporary women who crossed over into professional men’s hockey and golf. The paper did not challenge the biological assumptions about gender segregation in sport. However, in coverage of Jackie Robinson, the paper did critique baseball for being racially segregated and challenged biological reasoning for racial segregation. The *Times* normalized the essentialist notion that there are biological differences between men and women. The paper framed women entering men’s sporting events as publicity stunts. The physical appearance of women “crossover” athletes was routinely scrutinized in a way that is not done with men athletes. Finally, the *Times* represented these women athletes as “good girls” because they were not feminists crusading for all women (Travers, 2009). By sequestering these women as individuals disconnected from a larger social movement, social systems like sports are not challenged. According to Travers (2009) focusing on individual rights steers attention away from the power of structural forces. These women were positively depicted as individuals seeking greater challenge not activists fighting social injustice. They were praised for being diplomatic and having thick skin when it came to being the only girl. The media did not frame their skill within a larger context. In the process, these women were othered and isolated.

The media is a defining contributor of gender inequality in sports by failing to present information that reveals the existence of a continuum of athletic ability that supersedes binary gender categories (Kane, 1995; Travers, 2009). It is rare to see women performing with and against men in sports. To openly reveal the overlap of the athletic
accomplishments of men and women would be a direct challenge to justifications for gender segregation of sports and unequal allocation of resources (Kane, 2013; Travers, 2009). Many women accept the concept that men’s bodies are biologically different and superior to women’s bodies. This is the result of societal norms, immense pressure, and lack of representation.

Policies and Laws

Policies and laws may disrupt or reify inequalities in sport. Title IX of the Educational Act was signed into law in 1972 (Title IX, 1972). It has led to a great increase in the participation rates of girls and women in school supported sports (Francis, 2015; McDonagh & Pappano, 2008). However, the corresponding growth in school sports has been disproportionately advantageous for white, suburban girls with professional parents (Coakley, 2006; Messner, 2011). And, Title IX has not necessarily paved the way for girls playing baseball. Within the context of Title IX, softball is commonly considered to be an equivalent sport for girls. And, vague language in the act has created complications.

One ongoing issue is that Title IX standards for compliance are vague. To be in compliance, a school must meet one of three criteria (Milner & Braddock, 2016). Most schools meet the criteria of demonstrating expanding athletic opportunities for underrepresented groups. In many instances, schools have met this requirement, not by bringing about greater equality in funding for women’s sports, but by eliminating men’s sports. The elimination of men’s sports to bring about more equity in funding between men’s and women’s sports has led to resentment towards Title IX. This resentment
extends to efforts to create greater opportunities for girls and women in sports. Title IX does not require a school to eliminate men’s sports to achieve greater equality. It is the decision of some schools to do this to appear to be making progress toward the appearance of equality in order to be in compliance (Grant et al., 2008). The vague language of Title IX has made interpretation and implementation inconsistent.

One of the complexities of the language of Title IX, directly relates to baseball. The act states that if an organization offers a team sport for members of a “sex,” does not offer that team sport for “members of the other sex,” and sport opportunities for that sex have been limited, then the individual must be allowed to try-out for the team. This section of the act can be interpreted as an advantage for girls playing baseball on an all-boys’ team. Despite this, many girls have not been allowed to try out for a school baseball team or are openly discouraged from trying out. One of the problems with this wording is the assumption there are two oppositional sexes. Title IX specifically listed boxing, wrestling, rugby, ice hockey, football, and basketball as contact sports (Title IX, 1972 section 106.41). Baseball is not listed as a contact sport within the law. Another limitation of Title IX is it only applies to sport programs connected with schools or activities that receive federal funding (Cooky, 2009; Title IX, 1972). This means large numbers of recreational, private, and for-profit sport programs do not have to comply. These girls may be able to look to the 14th amendment for legal protection.

The Equal Rights Protection clause of the 14th amendment to the U.S. Constitution guarantees equal rights protection (U.S. Constitution, Amendment 14, § 1). The clause prohibits discrimination or different treatment unless there is a “compelling”
state interest (Love & Kelly, 2011). Legal justification for different treatment includes promotion of equal opportunities in sport to rectify past discrimination. The Equal Protection Clause may hold promise for girls who want to play baseball. The courts have ruled barring a girl from playing a sport because she is a girl violates her rights as guaranteed in the Equal Protection Clause (McDonagh & Pappano, 2008).

Despite these laws, the segregation of sport by gender has been maintained through legal means and is culturally normalized (Musto et al., 2017). Love and Kelly (2011) researched 14 U.S. court cases of boys seeking to play on girls’ teams where there were no boys’ teams available in the sport. In 13 of the cases, the court ruled the boys were not allowed to play on girls’ teams. The court decisions revealed essentialist assumptions. Specifically, the cases revealed an assumption that girls are inferior athletes, more fragile, and need protection from boys. In the majority of court cases, it was presumed the presence of a boy on the team was a threat to girls physically and psychologically. In the single ruling that allowed the boy to play on the girls’ team, the court stated the assumption girls are weak, fragile, and in need of protection in sport conflicts with truth (Love & Kelly, 2011). Furthermore, Love and Kelly (2011) asserted gender binary presumptions of athletic ability are outdated generalizations. In the case of race, the Supreme Court of the United States has ruled that separate cannot be equal.

According to Milner and Braddock (2016), the Brown vs. Board of Education decision of 1954 established separate cannot be equal and should apply to gender segregation in sport. Despite Title IX, women and girls still face disadvantages in athletic development due to inequalities in facilities, funding, coaching, and training. By
preventing men and women from competing with and against each other, the myth binaries occur naturally is validated. “Accommodation” implies the playing field has been equalized.

The appearance of accommodation is an important tool for retaining power and maintaining hierarchies based on social constructs and essentialism. Systems of oppression have historically mutated into new forms of expression. The removal of formal barriers does not necessarily lead to the elimination of barriers. Organizations may allow or place a few “actors” to give themselves “moral credential” (Ray, 2019). Another term for this practice is “tokenism.” Policies can be adopted to decrease discrimination and yet there may be little or no actual impact. It is presumed these policies were adopted with good intention and organizational leaders are typically not held accountable for the lack of change. A baseball league can say, “We allow girls to play,” even when they do not have a single girl playing. This is a disconnect between formal policies and practice. What has the organization done to communicate that girls can play? What is communicated when all the coaches are men? What is communicated when adult women volunteers have been relegated to social activity coordinators or score keepers? Most organizations appear to be neutral. Organizations are commonly presumed to be well intentioned especially when they are non-profit, have good standing in the community, are staffed by community leaders, and have an altruistic mission. Both in a court room and when filing a complaint with a league or organization, discrimination has to be proven by a preponderance of evidence. Proving discrimination legally can be difficult. And, rules and policies created to prevent discrimination may not be adequately enforced.
Rules and policies to protect people from discrimination are routinely not enforced. For example, a Little League team may have a policy of allowing girls to try-out, but a girl has never made the team. The policy of allowing girls to play is of little consequence when actual practice is considered. When policies and laws are not enforced the structure of discrimination remains unchanged. Power and resources remain firmly in the control of the dominant group. The dominant group’s sole discretion over the enforcement of policies can also be problematic when rules are inflexible and rigidly interpreted.

In 1997, 12-year-old Melissa Raglan was playing catcher for her baseball team (Lopez, 1997). The umpire forced her coach to take her out of the game because she was not wearing a protective cup. A few days later Raglan stuffed a cup into a sock and wore it on her shin since the rules did not say where the cup had to be worn. Again, league officials forced her out of the game. She was not allowed to play the catcher position again until her parents discovered a company that made “jillstraps” for girls. This illustrates the manner in which a structure enforced an existing rule which resulted in exclusion and limitation. Organizations have the power to discriminate in various ways.

Ray (2019) described this contradiction between policy and actual practice as decoupling. Ray’s (2019) theory of racialized organizations includes four tenets: 1) organizations can either enhance or diminish the agency of gendered groups of people, 2) gendered organizations sanction or normalize unequal distribution of resources, 3) being male is a credential or advantage within these structures, 4) decoupling is gendered and formal organization rules and practices are decoupled from practice. These tenets
illustrate how organizations reproduce gender discrimination. An organization can make a change such as “allowing” girls to play baseball in order to avoid pecuniary damage. This policy may be decoupled from actual practices that inhibit girls from playing such as marketing materials only depicting boys and registration forms with gender check boxes. And, individuals within the organization can continue to engage in discriminatory behavior without sanction. Individuals may actually be empowered to discriminate by organizational policies. For example, because an organization does not include depictions of girls in marketing materials, a coach feels empowered to say, “Girls don’t play baseball.” The protection of coaches who discriminate from repercussion enables discrimination. Finally, individual adults within the organization may engage in informal discriminatory behavior such as encouraging girls to register for softball.

Ray (2019) emphasized that resource differentials between individuals and organizations further protect structures such as organizations. The process to file a legal case is time consuming and expensive. Individuals seeking to defend their rights are at a disadvantage. Maria Pepe’s successful lawsuit against Little League Baseball was argued by a lawyer for NOW on her behalf. Such civil rights organizations have limited resources and cannot represent every individual. Protracted legal battles lead to delayed justice which further discourages legal challenges to discriminatory practices. Pepe was an 11-year-old when she started playing for a Little League team. By the time the case was settled two years later, she was too old to play. The fact a girl may have to resort to the legal system to pursue her right to play illustrates barriers. Lawsuits take resources of time, money, and access to legal representation. Many families do not have these
resources. And, such resources are unequally distributed at intersections of race, class, sex, and sexuality.

Policies which focus on solutions to gender inequity and discrimination, often fail to address the needs of women of color, the LGBTQ community, and those who are economically disempowered. The needs of these diverse groups are not parallel to the challenges of white, middle class, heterosexual women. Policies are defined and written by people in a position of power which translates into white, male, middle to upper-class, and heterosexual. Discrimination can be unconscious. The enactment of policy does not immediately mitigate the harmful and negative attitudes which have been created through the normalization of discrimination. The attitudes remain and these attitudes find different ways of manifesting when previous means are no longer viable. The traditional categorization of sport by gender is a reflection of white, male, middle to upper-class, heterosexual values.

Is Softball “Girls’ Baseball?"

One of the criticisms of gender segregated sports is “girls” sports are often diminutive versions. For instance, in Grand Slam tennis events, women play the best of three sets and men play the best of five sets. In other professional tennis venues, women and men both play the best of five sets. The WNBA basketball is one inch smaller and two ounces lighter than a regulation NBA basketball (Jope, 2019). Although softball is commonly accepted as the girls’ equivalent of baseball, there are differences between the two games applicable to rules, equipment, and style of play (Table 1).
The data in the table reflect that baseball and softball are not interchangeable. There are similarities and differences. One of the differences that stands out as different between MLB’s rule book and that of NCAA softball is the use of pronouns, MLB marked coaches as exclusively men. NCAA softball marked coaches as men or women. Uniforms are different but the differences are not spelled out in either rule book. In general, baseball uniforms are looser fitting than softball uniforms. This is consistent with the sexualization of women’s bodies and feminine hegemony. In Olympic softball women players wear shorts. Michelle Cobb has played NCAA-Division I softball and the against the most elite women baseball players in the world (Baccellieri, 2018). Cobb’s background gave her unique insight. She said, “They’re completely different sports. The strategy is entirely different.”

Other differences relate to equipment used for each game. An obvious difference between softball and baseball is the size of the ball (Paventi, 2011). Softballs are much larger than baseballs. In baseball the ball is pitched overhand, and in softball the ball is pitched underhand. Softball may be slow pitch or fast pitch. Generally slow pitch is played in adult recreation leagues. Fast pitch is played in youth competition and adult competitive leagues. Fast pitch softball consists of a rapid windmill windup and release. A slow pitch is thrown in a deliberate high arc. Recreation softball leagues are commonly referred to as “beer leagues” and may be coed with rules stipulating how many women and men can be in the lineup. There is no such fluctuation to address gender in baseball.

Baseballs are always white and NCAA softballs are optic yellow making them comparably easier to see. The yellow ball is used in NCAA softball because the distance
between the pitcher and batter is 17’ and 6” shorter than in baseball. The field dimensions in softball are much smaller too. The shorter length of softball games reinforces the conception that women are inferior athletes who cannot withstand 9 innings of play. In comparison, play is limited to 7 innings in softball. Kane (1995) defined “sport typing” as channeling men and women into sports that are consistent with gender stereotypes. Softball is perceived as less strenuous. Therefore, it is deemed more appropriate for girls than boys.
Table 1: Softball and Baseball Comparison

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Baseball (MLB, 2019)</th>
<th>Softball (NCAA, 2019)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pronouns used in rule book</td>
<td>He/His (This includes references to the manager and umpire.)</td>
<td>Her Head coach: He/She Umpires: He/She</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ball color</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Optic yellow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ball size</td>
<td>Min. circumference: 9” Max. circumference: 9 ¼: 5 to 5 ¼ oz.</td>
<td>Min. circumference: 11–7/8” Max. circumference: 12–1/4” 6 ½ oz. to 7 oz.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pitching</td>
<td>Overhand or sometimes a side delivery motion.</td>
<td>Underhand via a windmill delivery motion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pitcher surface</td>
<td>Mound 10” high</td>
<td>No mound, flat.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distance pitcher to batter</td>
<td>60’ 6”</td>
<td>43’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distance between bases</td>
<td>90’</td>
<td>60’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distance home plate to centerfield</td>
<td>400’ +</td>
<td>220’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distance foul lines</td>
<td>325’ min.</td>
<td>190’ min.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bat</td>
<td>Solid wood No longer than 42” 33 to 36 oz. (not in rule book)</td>
<td>Metal No longer than 34” Not to exceed 38 oz.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Game length</td>
<td>9 innings</td>
<td>7 innings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Base stealing</td>
<td>Allowed whenever the ball is live (no time out has been called)</td>
<td>Only allowed once the ball has left the pitcher’s hand. Runners cannot leave base when the pitcher has the ball in the pitcher’s circle.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lead offs for base runners</td>
<td>Allowed anytime</td>
<td>Not allowed until the ball has left the pitcher’s hand. Runners cannot leave base when the pitcher has the ball in the pitcher’s circle.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protective Equipment</td>
<td>Batting helmets do not include a face mask. Protective cups are not mandated in MLB.</td>
<td>Batting helmets may include a face mask.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gloves</td>
<td>Fielding gloves are 7 ¾” wide and 13” from tip of finger to heel. Size varies with position.</td>
<td>8” wide and 14” tip of top finger to heel. Size varies with position.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uniforms</td>
<td>Generally worn in a looser fit than softball (not in rule book). Hats or caps are not specified in rule book although all MLB players wear them.</td>
<td>Generally, more form fitting than in baseball (not in rule book). Shorts may be worn by a team. (Olympic softball players wear shorts.) Visors, head bands, and/or caps may be worn.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Re-envisioning Sport Categorization

According to Travers (2008), “racial segregation in sport has been abolished on the basis of the revelation that race is not meaningful as a biological category, so too should sex segregation,” (p. 90). Many scholars have argued for an end to binary gender categories in sports and in favor of envisioning the organization of sports in different ways (Kane, 1995; Martinkova, 2020a; Martinkova, 2020b; Minikel-Lacocque, 2020; Travers, 2013). For instance, Kane (1995) proposed that athletic ability should be analyzed on a continuum by positioning male and female athletes according to differences in actual athletic performance. The overlap and similarities in sport performances are ignored or invisible within a structure of gender segregation.

To illustrate the value of categorizing athletic performance on a continuum, Kane (1995) provided an example from a 1994 marathon to illustrate the continuum. That year 4,076 men and 1,423 women completed the marathon. The top woman to finish came in 66th out of a combined 5,499 finishers. Sixty-five men finished ahead of her. Typically, the focus is on the 65 men who finished ahead of the top woman runner. The continuum illustrates she finished ahead of 5,433 men and women. The fastest marathon time by a woman runner and a man differ by twelve minutes (Douglas & Nakamura, 2019). However, this represents a very small number of men and women athletes who can afford to train full time and avail themselves of top facilities and coaches. The opportunities for women to do this are disproportionately less. In addition, statistical data in professional sport often make it difficult to accurately compare male and female performance.
The statistics being kept can make it difficult to readily compare especially when the women’s version of the sport has different rules. For instance, in the WNBA women play two 20-minute halves instead of four 12-minute quarters. And, the NBA plays more than twice as many games as the WNBA. This underlies the difficulty of comparing statistical information. Baseball and softball statistics cannot be compared due to the myriad differences between the two games. These factors illustrate the need to envision different categories within sport.

One alternate option for sport categorization is weight and height. This is used in wrestling. According to Martinkova (2020a) one of the potentials of “mixed” gender sports is the opportunity for more equity in training conditions such as facilities, quality of coaching, and finances since men and women athletes are training simultaneously on the same teams. Mixed sports are an opportunity for men, women, and other sex identified people to cooperate and see each other as teammates. On the other hand, a negative mixed sport experience could lead to entrenching harmful stereotypes. It can also be problematic if the position of the woman on the team is protected or subordinate. It can be assumed there will be continued opposition to gender integration in sport just as there was opposition to racial integration.

Travers (2008) proposed completely eliminating gender segregation in sport would be a setback for many girls and women who are not among the most elite athletes in the world. An alternative would be to give girls the opportunity to integrate sport or play on girls-only teams as a voluntary choice. However, many American girls do not have a choice.
Baseball Development Structures for Girls

In most places in the United States, there are no all-girls’ baseball teams. For this reason, most girls who chose to play baseball will be the only girl on the team. The pressure increases as the girls get older. They are repeatedly told the boys will be bigger and stronger so they should switch to softball for their own safety (Ring, 2009b). A talented teen, female baseball player may feel the need to locate a high school coach willing to let her tryout for the team. At that point, she can hope the coach will give her a fair tryout. If she makes the team, she may be benched and receive little playing time while her skills suffer for lack of practice. Meanwhile, parents, coaches, and peers may urge her to switch to softball to chase the dream of a scholarship to play in college. In this way, her small circle of support may change over time and become more constricted. Many girls who have fallen in love with baseball resist the switch to softball because it feels like selling out (Ring, 2013). In no other sport, are the most elite athletes told to play a different sport, for their own good, because of their gender.

In the United States there is no infrastructure connecting the 100,000 girls playing baseball from tee ball, to high school, to college, and beyond. Elite American women baseball players who resist the intense pressure to switch to softball have few opportunities to play (Ring, 2013). They are essentially othered and isolated. They do not get scouted for professional baseball for two primary reasons. First, because they are women there is an assumption they can’t compete with men. Second, the infrastructure to develop the talent of women baseball players is lacking. One of the only aspirations for women baseball players is the Team USA Women’s National Baseball Team.
Malaika Underwood, captain of Team USA Women’s National Baseball Team, described the isolation and sense of otherness, “It can be lonely when you’re the only girl playing on a boys’ team. It just feels like you’re on an island,” (Baccellieri, 2018). Her teammate, Michelle Cobb, was not allowed to play baseball in high school. Cobb did play softball at Florida State before discovering the USA women’s national team. She had to train alone before she made the team in 2012. Training alone requires determination and resiliency. It also demonstrates the lack of support and otherness. American women face a double negative as women athletes in a sport gender marked as for men.

This situation is underscored by the fact USA Baseball is funded by MLB, a multi-billion-dollar business dominated by white, heteronormative, Ivy League men. USA Baseball offers eight different levels of play for boys and men (USA Baseball, 2020c). For women there is one team, one level. The team plays in the biennial World Cup of Women’s Baseball. The players practice for about two weeks as a team before the tournament. Many of the women have never played on a team with other women (Ring, 2015). USA Baseball is known to actively recruit college softball players. This creates unique challenges. Not all players can make the adjustments especially in a short time period. The women’s team faces additional challenges.

Few people know the USA Women’s National Baseball Team exists. The team receives little media coverage except for a few hometown newspapers covering local women on the team (Ring, 2013). The players must assume many expenses on their own such as traveling to tryouts. The team exemplifies the inherent inequalities of separate
baseball spheres for American men and women. It is different in countries outside the United States. For instance, Ring (2013) described the astonishment of team members when they received a frenzy of media attention in Venezuela in 2010. In comparison, when the tournament was held in America in 2018 few showed up to cover the event or watch (Batts Maddox, 2019). The fact the women’s event is a comparatively recent innovation contributes to the lack of publicity.

The first international women’s baseball “World Series” was held in 2001 at the SkyDome in Toronto (Langdon, 2019). In 2004, the World Cup of Women’s Baseball was first held in Edmonton, Canada (Heaphy & May, 2006). In comparison, the first men’s Baseball World Cup was played in 1938 (USA Baseball, 2020a). The naming of these events is consistent with gender marking in sport. According to Travers (2008) the gender marking of women’s pro sports leagues compared to men’s (Ladies’ Professional Golf Association vs. Professional Golf Association, and Women’s National Basketball Association vs. National Basketball Association) indicates the cultural assumption sport is a man’s domain unless it is specifically marked as a sport for girls and women. Despite these constraints, women’s baseball has grown rapidly.

Five teams competed in the inaugural World Cup of Women’s Baseball (Heaphy & May, 2006). The United States beat Japan to win gold in 2004 and 2006 (Harrigan, 2018). In 2018, 12 teams competed which was a more than twofold increase in 14 years (Baccellieri, 2018). Japan has won 30 consecutive games in the tournament and six consecutive gold medals dating back to 2008 (World Baseball Softball Confederation, 2018). In 2016 the Women’s Baseball World Cup was watched by 100 million
households in 198 countries (Harrigan, 2018). The 2018 series could be viewed on tv in Japan (Batts Maddox, 2019). However, not a single game aired on sports channels in the United States. Women’s baseball fans had to watch the games on YouTube. The American sport market does not reflect the rapid global growth of girls’ and women’s baseball.

The World Baseball Softball Confederation (WBSC), the body that governs the World Cup of Women’s Baseball and many other baseball/softball events, stated women’s baseball is the fastest growing sport within their broad global purview (Langdon, 2019). About 300,000 women play baseball all over the world, and the greatest growth for WBSC has been women’s baseball. Dana Bookman started organizing baseball for girls in Toronto, Canada in 2016. The first year there were 42 players aged 5 to 10-years-old. In 2018 the organization had 550 players and expanded programming to girls aged 4 to 16-years-old. The organization expanded to additional regions outside of Toronto and Ontario. Today the organization is known as Canadian Girls Baseball (CGB) and receives funding from the Jays Care Foundation (Toronto Blue Jays), Rawlings, and MLB’s RBI program (Canadian Girls Baseball, 2020). CGB intentionally positions women as coaches and umpires. The organization focuses on skill development and girls can participate whether or not they can afford the fees (Langdon, 2019). Both Canada and Australia offer girls’ and women’s national championships. There is no parallel to these championships for girls and women in the United States. This is indicated in competitive global rankings.
Leading up to the 2020 World Cup of Women’s Baseball, the Canadian Women’s National Team was ranked number two in the world (WBSC, 2020). According to Batts Maddox (2019), contemporary women’s baseball is post-Western because the power base is located in East Asian countries not the United States. At one time, baseball for girls was banned in many places in Japan because it was considered not feminine enough for high school age girls. However, this shifted and baseball became a way to help girls become stronger and healthier. In East Asia there is a development structure for girls playing baseball. According to Batts Maddox (2019), in East Asian countries baseball is treated as a distinct sport separate from softball. This has led to East Asian dominance of America’s national pastime among women playing the game.

Japan has dominated international women’s baseball for several reasons. As of 2020, the country is home to the only professional women’s baseball league (Batts Maddox 2019; Luther, 2018). This league gives Japanese women more opportunities to play baseball at a higher level than women anywhere else in the world. The league and women athletes have sponsors and devoted fans. In Japan, baseball is played during the middle of the school year so the Japanese have a relationship to baseball which is similar to the American relationship with college basketball and football (Luther, 2018). Although only a few public high schools in Japan offer girls’ baseball, numerous private high schools offer baseball for girls. Therefore, girls can aspire to play at private high schools, university, and the professional level. There is a development system in place which provides elite athletes with opportunities to play regularly, experience high quality coaching, experience high quality facilities, and receive financial renumeration. Japanese
women baseball players are role models for girls. It is much different for American women playing baseball.

In the United States, each girl or woman must fend for herself through a myriad of policies, attitudes, and constraints to participation. Batts Maddox (2019) referred to this as “sustained cultural conditioning and systematic exclusion” (p. 3). Japan’s international success is evidence of their ability to provide an infrastructure of development opportunities and overcome the cultural bias that has led to gender segregation in baseball in other parts of the world. This lack of development structure extends beyond the playing field.

Women’s baseball in the United States does not have a national governing body, a professional league, or a national championship (Batts Maddox, 2019). There are no high school or college level leagues for girls’ baseball in America. MLB has only recently offered the Trailblazers, Breakthrough Series, GRIT, and Elite Development Invitational camps (USA Baseball, 2020b). Each of these events lasts a few days, one time a year. This translates into the lack of a consistent, supportive infrastructure for girls and women’s baseball in America (Batts Maddox, 2019). This is why Ring described the participation in baseball by American women, “an act of rebellion,” (Ring, 2015, p. 149).

Summary

Girls and women have played baseball since the sport came into existence (Cohen, 2009; Ring, 2009b; Ring, 2013). Despite this American women and girls are still invisible in the game. Each time a girl makes her high school baseball time or an all-girls team is formed the general public views it as an anomaly. Every year media outlets
recycle the headline “In a League of Her Own” and relate the story of another girl who is the only girl on the team. This emphasizes the “otherness” of girls playing baseball. Batts Maddox (2019) wrote that a woman playing baseball, “disrupts an American cultural idea,” (p. 15). Despite over 100 years of trail blazing, American girls are still told the game is not for them. There is a lack of a baseball development structure for American girls and girls who play may not experience community wide support. It takes great determination and resiliency for girls to persist in the sport.

Gender is a social construct (Cooky, 2006; Koivula, 2001). Social constructs reflect expectations of gender performance. The binary construction of gender is harmful to boys and girls because it is limiting. Girls who defy feminine hegemony are othered. Differences in athletic ability are often the result of different opportunities to play, train, practice, and receive support as opposed to biological differences (Ring, 2013). According to Travers, “Given the cultural context within which athletes develop and perform, there is no uncontaminated data to support essential performance related differences between men and women,” (Travers, 2008, p. 90). Kane (2013) described the differences in athletic ability as being on a continuum from elite to unathletic. There is great overlap in the athletic abilities of girls and boys which is not reflected in culture and media (McDonagh & Pappano, 2008).

Culture and media reproduce gender binaries and inequalities. Although baseball and softball are different games, softball is typically considered the equivalent of baseball for girls. Thus far, the impact of policies and laws bridging the inequalities has been limited and mixed. Discriminatory structures adjust to changes in policies and the manner
in which discrimination is perpetuated shifts over time. And intersections of race, sexuality, class, and sex have a cumulative impact on the lived experiences of girls. Consequently, the research is inconclusive/inadequate about understanding the importance of opportunities for girls to play baseball.
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Qualitative Research

Qualitative research gives individuals who have been marginalized a voice (Henderson, 1996). In traditional, survey based, quantitative research, women have often been invisible (Henderson, 2013). Giving underrepresented individuals the opportunity to share their narrative is consistent with feminist research which strives to grant women power and representation (O’Shaughnessy & Krogman, 2012). The second wave of feminism established, “The personal is political,” (Hanisch, 1970). Personal experience is inextricably linked to historical and cultural context (Wright Mills, 1959). According to Hesse-Biber (2017):

Feminist perspectives developed out of the second wave of the women’s movement as a way to address the concerns and life experiences of women and girls, who, because of widespread androcentric or male bias, had long been excluded from knowledge construction both as researchers and research subjects, (p. 29).

The essence of personal experience cannot be adequately delineated in a survey or questionnaire. The goal of qualitative data collection is to get at the essence of the experience through the collection of individual narratives. The researcher seeks to ask questions which cause the participants to re-experience the situation. The qualitative research process can empower researchers to ask questions about society and the experiences of individuals in that society (O’Shaughnessy & Krogman, 2012). The qualitative approach creates opportunities for counternarratives that may reveal deeper insights into lived experiences of under-represented groups.
Counternarratives have been rendered invisible by hegemony (McDonald & Birrell, 1999). Counternarratives reveal social inequalities and resistance. The social world that is made visible in counternarratives is inevitably a combination of complex, multiple, and contradictory meanings. These meanings can shift over time. Since an individual’s narrative does not exist in a vacuum, it is necessary to consider the historical context of lived experiences. Through qualitative research, the researcher records, analyzes, tracks, reflects, and critiques the multiple, complex, contradictions which emerge from the data along intersections of race, gender, class, and sexuality.

**Phenomenology**

A qualitative, phenomenological research design is being implemented to empower participants to tell their story outside the limitations of a survey. The meaning is discovered in detailed descriptions (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009). The researcher seeks to find the essence of lived experiences of individuals who have experienced a like phenomenon (Starks & Brown Trinidad, 2007). By using a phenomenological method, the researcher, “seeks to understand experience, arguing that there is not one reality in which events are experienced,” (Hesse-Biber, 2017, p. 34). The goal is to understand the meanings different individuals connect with those experiences (Moustakas, 1994; Starks & Brown Trinidad, 2007).

Kvale and Brinkman (2009) defined phenomenology as:

A philosophical perspective based upon careful descriptions and analyses of consciousness, with a focus on the subjects’ life world; it attempts to bracket foreknowledge and involves a search for invariant essential meanings of the described phenomena. (p. 326).
For this to occur, the researcher must be open to the experiences of the participants. Towards this end, Hoffding and Martiny (2015) described a two-tier process in conducting phenomenological interviews (p. 543). The first tier is the actual interview. The second tier is the analysis of the interview which provides a framework for interpreting the descriptions. The two tiers feed into each other in an ongoing process. According to Kvale and Brinkman (2009), “The goal is to arrive at an investigation of essences by shifting from describing separate phenomena to searching for their common essence,” (p. 27).

The common essence emerges from personal data. Because the knowledge generated in the interviews is deeply personal there are no right or wrong answers to interview questions. “Internal phenomenological consistency” is the ability to make the knowledge shared in the interview intelligible (Hoffding & Martiny, 2015, p. 545). “External phenomenological consistency” is the ability of the research produced by the interviews to agree with or disagree with existing theories regarding the phenomena being researched (Hoffding & Martiny, 2015, p. 545). Both internal and external phenomenological consistency are related to validity.

Hoffding and Martiny (2015) described the quality of the interview process as the validity in phenomenological research. The knowledge of experiences obtained in the interviews is unique to the individuals interviewed. Therefore, the goal is not to make the study reproducible. According to Hoffding and Martiny (2015), “there is no such thing as a wrong or incorrect description, therefore, it makes no sense to ensure the truth or reproducibility of a description in the interview” (p. 558).
Research Design

In this section, the components comprising the research design will be examined: participants, data collection, bracketing, role of the researcher, positionality of the data analysis.

Participants

Participants were identified through purposeful sampling. The participants of a purposeful sample are in a position to share descriptive information about the circumstances being studied (Yilmaz, 2013). A stratified sample was not utilized, because interviewing is a deepening process. In addition, purposeful sampling as opposed to stratified sampling necessitated fewer participants, due to the time required.

In this study, the primary factors connecting the participants were self-identified as girls when they played baseball, played baseball as a member of a team in childhood, and ceased playing on a team by age 18. All participants self-identified as meeting the criteria. No upper age limit was applied to allow for the experiences of individuals from different generations. Volunteer participants were sought with no incentive offered to participants.

Adults who played baseball as girls have unique experiences. Their experiences were the basis for the knowledge in this study. This study focused on the experience of American girls playing baseball. The researcher sought American participants because the experience of American girls who play baseball is different than the experience of girls in other countries. Potential constraints such as race, gender, ethnicity, class, religion, and access to resources (skilled coaching, adequate facilities, development
system) varies greatly between different countries. The researcher reached out to different communities of people in the interest of representing diverse experiences. Geographic location, age, and race were recorded to track the diversity of participants.

Since baseball is gendered as a sport played by boys, adults who played baseball as boys were not interviewed for the purposes of this study. The focus of this research was not girls who persisted and continued to play baseball as the member of a team into adulthood. The narratives of girls who experienced uninterrupted play up to and past age 18, due to persistence or opportunity (such as living in the geographic location of one of the few amateur women’s baseball leagues) have been recorded in previous research (Ackmann, 2010; Borders & Hastings Ardell, 2017; P. E. Brown, 2003; Cohen, 2009; Fidler, 2006; Gregorich, 1993; Hastings Ardell, 2005; Heaphy & May, 2006; Ring, 2015; Shattuck, 2017).

The researcher sought potential participants through a targeted social media appeal and contacts within the girls’ and women’s baseball community. Participants were identified via requests for participants through the social media of existing groups advocating for the participation of girls and women in baseball such as Women Belong in Baseball. The social media platforms utilized in the search for participants were Facebook. Twitter, Instagram, and LinkedIn. Potential participants were also identified through the snowball method by asking participants if they knew anyone else who might be interested in being interviewed. Finally, the researcher actively sought participants while attending the Society for American Baseball Research conference in San Diego in June 2019.
There are a small number of baseball programs specifically for girls and women in the United States (Pawtucket Slaterettes, Eastern Women’s Baseball Conference, Seattle Diamonds). Since these opportunities are rare and inaccessible for most girls and women, participants who live in these regions were not specifically targeted for this study. Participants were sought from the many areas which do not have girls-only or women-only baseball programs since these programs are not common.

In the interest of foregrounding counternarratives and intersectionality, the researcher made an effort to interview women of different backgrounds, races, and geographical regions. The researcher strived to empower participants of color through a nonjudgmental opportunity to express the meaning of their experience in their own words. In this way, visibility can be gained and agency exercised. The researcher must take into consideration multiple dimensions of identity in the collection and analysis of data. It cannot be presumed the experiences of girls who identify with multiple disadvantaged groups (race, class, sexuality) are being represented. It is essential to find a balance between inclusion and not seeking to speak on behalf of a group of people. Including the experiences of a few people of color is not enough. “Tokenistic, objectifying, voyeuristic inclusion is at least as disempowering as complete exclusion,” (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1261). However, the small sample size did not result in a broad sampling in terms of race, ethnicity, and class. Additional research by women of color is needed on this topic.
Bracketing

Bracketing enables the researcher to focus analysis into experiential themes (Hoffding & Martiny, 2015). The descriptions in the transcribed interviews were categorized according to emerging themes. This was accomplished by identifying recurring key phrases in experience, interpreting the meaning, seeking the participant’s understanding of these themes, diligent consideration, and arrival at a conclusion about the meaning of the experience (Janesick, 2000). The process can be outlined in six phases.

Moustakas (1990) described a six-phase process leading up to, including, and following bracketing. This process includes: initial engagement, immersion, incubation, illumination, explication, and creative synthesis. The initial engagement is the discovery of an intense interest within the researcher. During immersion, the researcher dives deep into the research question. The incubation period gives the researcher an opportunity to process, reflect, and understand. When the researcher is receptive, illumination is awakened to the experience revealed. In the explication phase, the researcher analyzes the data for meanings. Through creative synthesis, the researcher develops a narrative using data as examples to share discoveries made in the preceding steps. In this concluding period of research, the researcher is able to articulate meaning. According to Janesick (2000), description must be effectively balanced with interpretation to result in greater understanding. Throughout this process, the researcher grows in awareness of self and the meanings of the experiences.
Role of the Researcher

The researcher has multiple obligations throughout the research process as the instrument, recorder, and learner. As the instrument, the researcher must establish reciprocal communication with the participant (Hoffding & Martiny, 2015). Together, the interviewer and participant generate information about an experience. Through interaction, a conversation develops (Valera & Shear, 1999). The participant provides a detailed account of themselves and their world (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). The interviewer must suspend judgment to prevent bias and must be empathic. It is this empathy that creates reciprocity. Hoffding and Martiny (2015) described this reciprocity as a, “more open interview in which you are not out to confirm already held theories,” (p. 541). In this process, the researcher records.

The interviewer is the instrument and guides the participant to describe experiences in the most clear, detailed and specific descriptions as possible (Hoffding & Martiny, 2015). This process can be described as an “opening up” or “unfolding.”. This unfolding includes memory and reflection. Part of the challenge for the researcher is to ask questions which enable the participant to put experience into descriptions of lived experiences. The interviewer can facilitate this process by redirecting the participant if the interview drifts into explanations or judgments rather than descriptions. The researcher must be mindful of the types of questions asked.

Hoffding and Martiny (2015) advised researchers to move away from asking “why” or “what” to the “how” of the experience. Open questions are asked as opposed to closed questions. Closed questions inject bias and suggest answers to the questions. Open
questions guide the participant to provide more detail. Such questions cue the participant to provide additional detail without injecting suggestions or judgment. The interviewer should rephrase the descriptions and invite the participant to verify accuracy and add more details. These descriptions of lived experiences may be shared in layers (Vermersch, 2009). Uncovering successive layers of description was described by Petitmengin (2006) as “deepening.” Through this process, the participant has an opportunity to communicate the breadth and depth of the lived experience (Hoffding & Martiny, 2015). The voices of participants must be prioritized before the voice of the researcher (Tufford & Newman, 2010). And, the voices of each participant must be given equal consideration (Yilmaz, 2013).

Ultimately, the participant’s voice must be heard in the interpretation not the interviewer voice (Hesse-Biber, 2017). The researcher’s thinking should be challenged by the views expressed by participants. According to Yilmaz (2013) in qualitative research realities are assumed to be socially constructed, complex, difficult to measure, subjective, and contradictory. Therefore, interpretations and perspectives are multiple. Uncertainty and negative cases are expected in qualitative research.

Positionality of the Researcher

By employing the qualitative interview method of research, the researcher is the instrument (Starks & Brown Trinidad, 2007; Tufford & Newman, 2010; Yilmaz, 2013). All data is filtered through the researcher. This poses challenges since the instrument is not free of bias. The researcher makes all decisions regarding coding, analyzing, and interpretation of data. This positions the researcher in the authoritative role of
determining the data highlighted and how it is interpreted (O’Shaughnessy & Krogman, 2012). Assumptions, beliefs, personal experiences and bias impact the study. The researcher must suspend judgement, strive to be objective, and be open to the data especially when it conflicts with the preconceptions of the researcher and other data.

The researcher is in a position of authority in determining what data will be included, how it will be included, and how the data will be interpreted. Through the bracketing process, the researcher engages in self-reflection in an effort to mitigate preconceptions that may have a harmful effect on the study (Starks & Brown Trinidad, 2007; Tufford & Newman, 2010). The researcher must acknowledge preconceptions and must refrain from value judgment. By being aware of preconceptions, the researcher can be open to contradictions that emerge in the data.

The researcher’s positionality is that of a white, American, disabled, LGBTQ woman, and nontraditional student. The researcher grew up in a working class, single parent household in a small Midwestern, predominantly white community. Growing up, the researcher wanted to play Little League Baseball and was told that was not an option. The researcher previously volunteered with an organization that provided baseball playing experiences for girls. Through this volunteer work, the researcher became acquainted with girls and women players, coaches, umpires, organizers, and fans. These experiences shaped the researcher’s opinions and beliefs. The researcher approached the study with the assumption girls who play baseball face discrimination. This research was initiated because of the lack of existing research regarding contemporary girls and women in baseball by centering their voices. Throughout this study, the researcher kept a
self-reflection journal. The researcher’s preconceptions were written out during this process. Self-reflection enabled the researcher to identify and examine preexisting beliefs and biases.

Data Collection

Once participants were identified they were sent an informed consent letter. Both the participant and the researcher signed the letter, per requirements of the Institutional Review Board (IRB). Next, a date and time was be set up for the interview either face-to-face or over the phone. Due to common interruptions, lags in audio, and other inconsistencies in video conferencing, phone interviews were done instead. A copy of a letter including information about the research and the researcher’s contact information was given to all participants. At the beginning of each interview, the researcher read from the informed consent letter to remind participants of their right to privacy as well as their right to change their mind about participation. Participants were then interviewed by the researcher.

All interviews were audio recorded with a digital audio recorder and transcribed at a later time. The researcher kept a field observation log during interviews. Observations included body language, tone of voice, and theoretical considerations. The researcher also used the field log to write down points to ask the participant to describe in more detail without interrupting the person speaking. Because the nature of this study required memories of the past, observation in the original, natural environment was not possible.
The interviews were semi-structured with a few prepared questions (Appendix A). After the initial interviews, the questions were refined and strengthened to better elicit thick descriptions. The researcher’s committee provided feedback during this process. The interview process gave the researcher an opportunity to ask follow-up questions to delve deeper, elicit thicker descriptions, and for clarity. The interviews were free flowing, open conversations guided by the researcher. Although it is impossible to eliminate all bias, efforts were made to decrease sources of bias. The researcher structured questions as open-ended and inquiring. Shadowed data was collected when participants shared about the experience of other girls in addition to their own (Starks & Brown Trinidad, 2007).

Throughout data collection, a list of the names of the individuals interviewed, dates and times, location, and duration was maintained. This information was kept confidential. Only the researcher had access to the recordings of interviews, identifying information about participants, and field notes. The researcher created pseudonyms for the participants and no identifying information was shared with anyone other than the relevant participant.

The researcher stopped doing additional interviews when the same or similar experiences were heard repeatedly in interviews. This is the point of saturation. The concept of saturation has been debated by researchers. Saturation has been defined, in part, as, “when further coding is no longer feasible,” (Fusch & Ness, 2015, p. 1408). The analysis of the data proceeds, “until one has reached a certain level of consistency
whereby one can understand all (or most of) the descriptions in the light of the conceptual framework achieved,” (Hoffding & Martiny, 2015, p. 544).

Data Analysis

The researcher personally transcribed each interview. This led to immersion in the data because this required typing each word spoken and reviewing for accuracy. Each participant had an opportunity to review the transcript to make changes, corrections, or add description. The data was analyzed sentence-by-sentence. Data that stood out or resonated with other data from other interviews was highlighted. Bracketing was achieved by coding transcripts of interviews for recurring themes and phrases (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). The data was decontextualized by breaking it down into categories and assigning thematic codes. This required comparing data from each interview for similarities and differences. A running list of recurring themes and phrases was tallied and patterns noted. The bracketed data was analyzed for overlap and intersections. This led to the creation of clusters of data comprised of themes and phrases.

Since the nature of qualitative research is subjective, the researcher must be flexible and willing to consider alternate explanations for conflicting or negative data. It is essential for the researcher to examine data which does not agree with other data. Unlike quantitative research, this data is not thrown out. This negative data is an opportunity to examine coding categories to ensure they are reflective of the actual data. The coding categories and data must be in agreement (Hesse-Biber, 2017).

When data did not fit into these thematic categories the researcher engaged in reflection to consider how data from different participants was related. The examination
of this negative data challenged the researcher to discover underlying meanings of the experiences. This process also contributed toward including the experience of each participant in the study. Upon reflection and analysis, one theme flowed into another and intersections emerged. In this way the data was recontextualized into a few dominant themes which spanned the experiences of participants. Finally, the data and themes were synthesized through the writing of narrative. The writing process provided a key opportunity to analyze the data. Meaning emerged in narrative form.

Throughout the data analysis process memos were written in the transcripts and a field log. The memos served as a way to record the ongoing inner dialogue of the researcher’s engagement with the data (Hesse-Biber, 2017). The memos provided documentation of the evolution of the analysis of the data.

The data was interpreted through the lens of feminist cultural studies, queer theory, and intersectional theory. Cultural practices can be examined through feminist cultural studies (Waldron, 2019). Feminist cultural study recognizes identity as the fluid result of hierarches. Within feminist cultural studies, privilege and marginalization are viewed as occurring as a result of the enforcement of masculine and feminine hegemonies. Feminist research delves into the knowledge of women, destabilizes unequal distribution of power in relationships, and confronts inequalities built on social constructs (O’Shaughnessy & Krogman, 2012). Queer theory questions social structures which produce the social constructs of sex, gender, and heteronormativity (Waldron, 2019).

Intersectional theory was utilized in this study to reveal the many ways systems of oppression interconnect in the lives of people who are disempowered due to their identity
Through intersectional analysis, the researcher is better equipped to consider the multiple dimensions of the experience of girls such as gender, race, class, and sexuality. Examining these factors individually leads to an incomplete analysis (Alexander, 2013). For instance, racial inequalities and racial hierarchy persist in America. Within this hierarchy, whiteness is dominant, advantaged, and normalized. As a result, whiteness has not been interrogated within the context of research despite the fact there are social, political, economic, and cultural consequences to race in America. Intersectional study empowers researchers to consider the implications of race including whiteness in the study of social phenomena.

**Limitations and Delimitations**

One of the challenges of phenomenological research is it can be difficult for participants to put experience into words. Follow-up questions were asked with the purpose of digging deeper. In an ongoing process throughout the collection of data, the researcher evaluated interview questions to ascertain if the questions in the guide were effective in accessing the experiences of the participants. Questions were adjusted accordingly to refine procedures.

In qualitative research, the researcher relies on self-reporting. Self-reporting can be limiting because memories may not be accurate. However, truth is subjective. The meaning participants ascribe to their experience is valid.

Interpretations of childhood memories can be malleable over time. Also, participants may exaggerate. Due to the inherent fallibility of memories, participants may not be aware that the memory they are relating is not accurate. Participants may also feel
embarrassed and may not share relevant information. And, participants may report what they think the researcher wants to hear or report in a manner to make themselves look more favorable (Heppner et al., 2016). The confidentiality of the interviews was an effort to mitigate these factors.

Phone interviews presented an additional challenge. Due to proximity, 17 of 21 participants were interviewed over the phone, not in-person. At times, the quality of the audio was poor, broken up, or interrupted. This was mitigated by asking the question again, seeking clarity in follow-up questions, and sending a copy of the transcript to each participant for review of accuracy. In this process, participants were given an opportunity to add to the description. However, phone interviews meant the absence of observable body language or physical cues. The researcher did not find this to be a major obstacle because body language can be conflicting.

Finally, qualitative research is focused on descriptions from a necessarily small sample size therefore it is not readily generalizable. More detailed descriptions result in solid data not quantity (Starks & Brown Trinidad, 2007). According to Denzin and Lincoln (2000), “thick descriptions make thick interpretation possible,” (p. 391).

**Summary**

Qualitative research contributes to understanding the personal, lived experiences of underrepresented individuals. The lived experiences of girls who have played baseball has the potential to provide needed insight as counternarratives. Through knowledge of the experiences of multiple individuals, a better understanding of a larger phenomenon can be gained. The experiences shared through this research will contribute to the
dialogue about girls and women in baseball. This research may also contribute to the
dialogue about resistance to inequalities. This research may contribute towards the
development of a model for sport participation free of gender barriers.
CHAPTER IV.
FINDINGS

Introduction

In this section, data collected from interviews with participants will be presented. First, demographic information about participants will be explained. Next, revisions in interview questions will be presented. Then, four themes that emerged from the data will be set examined. The last section will include discussion of the findings, implications for professionals in the field, and recommendations.

Demographics of Participants

Twenty-one individuals were interviewed for this study. Two of the women identified their family background as lower-working-class or poor. The participants played for an average of 6 years. The shortest amount of time played was one year. Four participants played until age 15 or older. Demographic data was self-identifying. The data emerged during the interview. Participants were asked how they identified regarding race because the researcher did not want to make presumptions. Two participants voluntarily identified as LGBTQ in the context of the interview. One participant was one of the 19 girls to play in the Little League World Series (as of 2020).

Twenty of the 21 participants either had a college degree or were current college students. Every participant indicated a professional career as an adult. Their careers included counselor, college softball coach, youth mentor, football coach, pro softball player, emergency responder, youth director, MLB baseball operations, business owner, human resources professional, manager, pro baseball player, college faculty, baseball
coach, and technology. Several participants demonstrated initiative as business owners or and advocates for disadvantaged groups. Participants directly connected playing sport including baseball with these pursuits.

Sarah, who is a college faculty member, said, “It’s really kind of set the foundation for my own aspirations now as I’ve gotten older.” Breanna, a football coach, said, “It had such an impact on who I am and certainly shaped who I am,” and, “I think being the only girl on a field, now with football, is like, baseball prepared me for the life that I’m living now.”

Zina, who works for a university, said of her baseball playing experience, “I think it’s everything. It gave me confidence to step out on the field and be the only girl.” Neva, a youth director, said:

It means a lot. I guess in a way it means that I won. I won a little fight. I stuck up for myself, and I was willing to break a couple barriers to allow myself to be me. I think it shaped a lot of the way that I live my life ever since. It’s one of those where I already survived it so why not do this too and see what happens. I think I owe what I did back then to a lot of my decisions since.

The interviews lasted between 45 minutes to 1 hour and 21 minutes. None of the participants opted to discontinue participation. Additional demographic information about participants can be found in Table 2 and Table 3.
Table 2: Participant Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographic</th>
<th># of participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Race</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic/White</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latina/White</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Region</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northeast</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Coast</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Midwest</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MidAtlantic</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southwest</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southeast</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age (19-50s)</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>30s</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40s</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50s</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Education</strong></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current college student</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>College degree</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
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Table 3: Participant Pseudonyms

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Age</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Position Played</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>White</td>
<td>Northeast</td>
<td>Not shared in interview</td>
</tr>
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<td>Rachel</td>
<td>50s</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>West Coast</td>
<td>Catcher/outfield</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abby</td>
<td>40s</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>West Coast</td>
<td>Pitcher/Shortstop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emily</td>
<td>20s</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Midwest</td>
<td>Shortstop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cassie</td>
<td>20s</td>
<td>Latina</td>
<td>Northeast</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah</td>
<td>40s</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Southwest</td>
<td>Middle infielder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maya</td>
<td>20s</td>
<td>African-American</td>
<td>Midwest</td>
<td>Outfield</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lynn</td>
<td>50s</td>
<td>White</td>
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<td>Outfield</td>
</tr>
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<td>Northeast</td>
<td>Shortstop</td>
</tr>
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<td>Breanna</td>
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<td>Hispanic and White</td>
<td>Mid Atlantic</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
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<td>White</td>
<td>Multiple Regions</td>
<td>Pitcher/1B</td>
</tr>
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<td>White</td>
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<td>Middle Infielder/Catcher/Pitcher</td>
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<td>West Coast</td>
<td>Infield/Outfield/Pitcher</td>
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<td>Hispanic and White</td>
<td>West Coast</td>
<td>Pitcher/1B</td>
</tr>
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<td>Neva</td>
<td>20s</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Southeast</td>
<td>Catcher/3B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pam</td>
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*Not included to protect confidentiality

Revisions to Interview Questions and Protocol

After the first two interviews, two ice breaker questions were added to put participants more at ease and facilitate interaction between the researcher and participant:
1. What is your favorite baseball team?
2. Do you have a favorite baseball player past or present?

As data was collected the working title of the study evolved from “Going, Going, Gone! Reasons Girls Ceased Participation in Baseball” to “I Was a Trailblazer: A Phenomenological Study of the Baseball Playing Experience of Girls.” The data collected from participants precipitated the title change of the study to more accurately reflect the data collected.

**Theme 1: Complexities and Intersections**

Participant experiences did not fit neatly into categories. The meanings participants attached to their experiences sometimes overlapped. And, sometimes the meanings were oppositional. This is consistent with intersections of identities resulting in experiences that are not necessarily parallel. It is also consistent with the nature of qualitative research which explores counternarratives. Meanings can shift over time and multiple and complex meanings emerge from different narrators. Individuals in marginalized groups may challenge the status quo in some ways and take on characteristics of the dominant group in other ways. The nature of gender as a social construct creates a paradox for girls who do not fit into hegemonic ideologies of femininity and masculinity.

Valerie described what it was like playing baseball as a girl, “If you choose to ignore that pressure and continue playing what you want to play, there’s all kinds of stuff that comes along with that.” At age 12, Valerie, “had the nerve to ask out,” a boy in her class. He responded, “You can’t be my girlfriend if you hit a baseball further than I.” For Valerie, “That stayed with me for so long. I felt like, am I doing something wrong?”
Feeling different was often something that was difficult to articulate especially as a young girl. For Gina the defining moment was a tryout to either make the major division team, which came with perks like better uniforms and travel, or the minor division team. Gina’s brother was placed in the major division. She was placed in the minor division. Gina said, “To my mom it was a social justice issue. She says I was as good as my brother.”

While some participants reported numerous instances of inequality and discrimination, some reported they had very few or no memories of discrimination. Like gender, playing baseball as a girl was not a binary experience that was either all good or all bad. Frances said, “Everyone knew I was one of the guys.” Gina said, “I don’t remember being treated differently at all.” On the other hand, Gina said:

I was just as good as the rest of them but it became this, there was something about me that was different and so I had to almost be tougher, better, more talented than the people around me in order to survive.

Zina also reported not having problems with the boys when she played baseball. However, like Frances, she had to prove herself playing baseball. In regards to the issue of credibility and her teammates she said:

I never had any problems with them. They always respected me because I could play. It wasn’t like I was just a girl choosing to play baseball that couldn’t back it up with talent. I mean there were boys that couldn’t play that were out there. I always like led the team in batting average. I played key positions. Like I said, I never really had problems with it.

Breanna also addressed the issue of feeling like she had to prove herself and the fact boys were automatically presumed proficient while girls were not:
I think that’s the difference between the male athletes and the female athletes is I had to prove who I was before I got notoriety, and the other players didn’t need to prove who they were. They were just already assumed to be good.

Breanna explained the credibility gap which is a result of essentialist beliefs:

I didn’t mind it. I think I was so used to it. It was just the way it was when I was 4. At that time, you don’t have a conception of gender. You don’t have the ideology that older people have or a language to explain the world around you. It just is that way, and you fight it.

Some participants, like Jackie, reported they were unphased by being the only girl on the team. Jackie described a sense of assimilation playing baseball with boys:

I didn’t know anything different so it was normal for me. I was used to playing with the boys. I didn’t mind playing with the guys. They were all like my brothers especially once they got to know me. I just fit right in with them, for the most part.

However, she also related the local recreation department called her parents each year after she registered for baseball. She remembered hearing her mom say each time, “We signed up for baseball. She doesn’t want to play softball.” Eventually Jackie was encouraged by friends to leave the local recreation league and play in a different town. At tryouts in the new town:

…the coaches were fighting over me when it was time to pick teams. Which was a completely different feeling and experience…That was kind of a cool thing to hear. Going from not being wanted at all to we all want you.

This statement seems to contradict her previous statement that she fit in with the boys.

When Jackie got to high school she persisted in baseball. She said, “The AD was good. They knew I was coming to tryout. They knew where I was from. They knew all about me before I even got to tryout. Thankfully, it wasn’t an issue.” This indicates she was not
always one of the guys. Participants shared feeling both acceptance and different at various times playing baseball.

The theme of acceptance or normalcy was often contradicted within the same interview. Maya, said, “I don’t think I noticed. I was a tomboy growing up. I grew up with all boys, my cousins and stuff. I don’t think I really noticed.” On the other hand, Maya described softball as, “More like normal. And baseball I was like the odd ball out type of thing because I was the only girl.”

Like Maya, Lynn was accustomed to playing with boys. She expressed that she was accepted. She also expressed concern they would not accept her:

I was always a tomboy. I was used to playing with boys and rough housing. I was probably surprised. I felt like they’re not going to take me seriously. The kids on the team that knew me, knew not to mess with me. I didn’t’ have any problems that way.

Lynn had a unique experience. The first year she was the only girl on the team. The following year there were four or five girls on her team. As a girl on an all-boys’ team Lynn may have reified the notion girls were not to be taken seriously. She said, “The next year when girls did join the team it was like, why are they here? They don’t really want to play. They’re just here to chat up some boys or something.”

Zina described feeling like she had assimilated with her male teammates, “I always felt like I was one of the boys, honestly.” Zina emphasized she, “never had any problems.” Later in the interview Zina remembered, “When they found out I was a girl on the All-Star team they’re like, girls aren’t allowed to play.”
Participants faced intersecting constraints in addition to gender. This is consistent with intersectional theory that race, class, sexuality, and gender are interlocking systems of inequality and oppression. For instance, seven participants identified themselves as “tomboys” growing up. Other participants used different words such as “athletic.” This is consequential because tomboys express gender nonconformity since they are not easily categorized within feminine hegemony. Five participants shared pictures of themselves when they played baseball. The photos spanned three decades. Except for longer hair, in some instances, the photos reflected a young athlete with little indication as to the gender of the baseball player. In her description of herself growing up, Zina expressed gender nonconformity. She said she was a, “Total tomboy. I mean my parent’s friends would ask me, ‘What do you want to be when you grow up?’ And, I’d say a boy.”

Participants expressed that gender nonconformity resulted in presumptions they were gay. This illustrates the stigma that athletic girls are not “normal.” This is especially true of girls playing “boys” sports. Lynn stated that in high school, softball was referred to as “dyke ball” by her classmates.

The feeling of not fitting in could be powerful. Valerie said:

I felt ashamed. It’s so sad. It’s just like, “Oh, this is something that is a problem for other people.” And, again I’m 12. I don’t think I even talked about it with anybody. And, I don’t mean to say ashamed like I hid in the closet and cried or anything. It didn’t make me puff my chest out and say, “Yeah, so?” It’s like, oh. Okay. You know what I mean? And, it made me like I was being recognized and acknowledged more for the abnormal part of girls playing baseball.

“Feeling different” necessitated participants negotiate differences in addition to gender and sex. Frances described her mother’s family as “traditional Mexican” and her dad as
white. She stated her maternal grandfather advised her mother, “Don’t be too smart. You
want the boys to like you. You don’t need to try too hard. A boy will take care of you for
the rest of your life. Just be pretty.” Her mother did not take this advice and supported her
daughter’s choice to play baseball. Frances’ mother also encouraged her to get a college
degree. Like many girls, she did not easily fit into preconceived notions of race and
expressed a sense of double consciousness as well as the interplay of different identities:

My mom, she did her best so that we grew up in the affluent community. I guess
back then, I didn’t really know where I fit in. You know what I’m saying. I knew
I was Mexican, but I wasn’t Mexican. I knew I wasn’t white, but, that’s where she
wanted me to fit in... My mom wanted what was best for us. She put us in the
white schools. She made sure we had that kind of education.

Frances was not alone in facing challenges due to social class. Cassie stated her mom
couldn’t afford to pay for her to play in showcase baseball tournaments. The travel ball
experiences of some participants included steep monetary expenses. Not all families
could afford to provide these experiences for these girls.

Quinn remembered not having money growing up. Her mom had to work multiple
jobs and was typically unable to attend her games. In this challenging environment,
Quinn said, “Baseball was my happy place.” In Quinn’s blue-collar home town, the high
school emphasized learning a trade instead of going to college. Most of Quinn’s
classmates went to work immediately after high school. However, Quinn earned a
scholarship to play college softball and a 4-year college degree. Quinn’s parents divorced
when she was young so she grew up in a single parent household.

Several participants had divorced parents. Some grew up in blended families with
step parents. As a matter of necessity, sometimes parents signed them up for baseball, at
least in part, as a form of babysitting when parents worked. Pam shared what it meant to her growing up in a small working-class town. She had fond memories of a community that supported youth and reflected on her conflicting experiences as a parent:

We didn’t have a lot of money so we all shared every resource that we had from a community perspective. Now it seems like if you want to be on a particular competitive team you have to have thousands of dollars to join that team and pay for those tournaments and pay for that indoor arena to be able to practice…I feel fortunate I grew up in the back woods where we didn’t have money, because we just made it fun.

**Summary of Theme 1: Complexities and Intersections**

Participants shared multiple and sometimes conflicting meanings attached to their experiences. This is consistent with the nature of qualitative research. Different girls have different experiences due to race, ethnicity, class, and to what degree they are gender conforming. Those who were gender nonconforming experienced presumptions they were gay which is has been a consistent theme for athletic girls. Therefore, it is logical for participants to relate different meanings associated with their experiences.

As a girl playing a “boys” sport they lived a paradox. Essentialism was normalized so it was not necessarily questioned. While boys automatically had credibility as team members, these girls often felt they had to prove they belonged on the team. Therefore, as a girl who must prove her credibility in a contested space, it is natural for different girls to have conflicting meanings related to the experience. It is likely they received mixed messages throughout the experience which contributed to conflicting interpretations. Participants consistently expressed they felt “different” with the presumption that girls were inferior athletes compared to boys.
Theme 2: Otherness

Rachel described herself as a girl playing baseball, “I was an alien.” Participants consistently expressed they felt different and were presumed to be inferior athletes compared to their male teammates. They were members of a team. However, they were not members of the dominant group of boy teammates. This resulted in othering. Although there is no singular, defining experience as a girl playing baseball, each participant grappled with a sense of otherness in her own way. This was complicated by the fact it can be difficult to articulate feelings as a youth. Almost every participant was the only girl.

Whether it was a small town or a large municipal league, 20 of the 21 participants experienced being the only girl on her team. If “seeing is believing” they did not see baseball as inclusive. In a team environment, the needs of individuals are often sublimated in the pursuit of team goals. This can result in a sense of invisibility for an individual who feels “different.”

Julie started playing baseball immediately after the Maria Pepe decision in 1974. She observed there were only three or four girls in her league of 300 players. Sarah remembered a few girls playing tee ball, but as she got older the numbers quickly dissipated. By age 12, Sarah was the only girl in her league and city. Neva stated no one in her town had seen a girl play baseball until she played. Breanna was the only girl on the baseball field for 8 years. Emily said, “Not once did I encounter another girl.” Likewise, Jackie did not play with or against any other girls. She remembered:
I never saw another girl. Never played against another girl. I heard rumors that there was one playing, I think she was from about two hours from me. I never actually met her or played against her.

The effect of not seeing girls and women play has been intergenerational. Pam stated her daughter thinks baseball is for boys and softball for girls because, “She never saw me play.” Seeing or not seeing other girls playing mattered.

Some participants remembered an older girl who played in the community. Lynn remembered an older girl who played, “She was good. And, I’m like, oh. A girl can play. We don’t just get to play catch. She’s actually on a team.” Debra remembered an older girl who made the next level in the league. Gina reminisced that a girl one year older was a “legend” because she played in the Little League World Series. Abby remembered an older girl in her community whose father had to take some form of legal action to enable his daughter to play at the next age level. This was significant for Abby because she saw she could play past age 12. Abby played until age 14.

Valerie saw the Colorado Silver Bullets play when she was a girl. The Silver Bullets were an all woman’s baseball team in the 1990s that played against men’s teams. Valerie collected autographs from the players and still possesses souvenirs from the game. She said, “That was the first time I saw adult women playing baseball. And that kind of made a really big difference in my outlook because they made me feel a little bit more normal.”

Without something to aspire to, the absence of other girls playing impacted participants. Emily said, “I had to be my own role model.” Sarah said, “I did not
necessarily have a role model in fighting.” By fighting, she meant persisting to play baseball despite the pressure to switch to softball:

I think that I would have fought if I had known that I could fight. But then I realize, I didn’t know that I would do that. I acquiesced, and I accepted it. And I thought, oh, he’s right. I have to go play softball. Because I didn’t know fighting was an option.

**Summary of Theme 2: Otherness**

Almost every participant experienced being the only girl on the baseball team. Participants consistently expressed they felt, at some point, different from their teammates as the only girl on the team. This difference came with the presumption girls are inferior athletes compared to boys. Seeing or not seeing other girls or women playing baseball impacted them. Not having role models to aspire to made a difference. Therefore, their support circle was consequential in their experience.

**Theme 3: Small Support Circle**

Participants reported a small inner circle of support. This was typically limited to parents, siblings, possibly grandparents, and sometimes a coach or teammate. At times there were conflicting degrees of support within their immediate family or conflicting messages sent to them. Cassie observed, “Support systems may change.” She reflected on a coach she thought was supportive:

I’ve always known him since I was little. He never actually spoke up to the varsity coach about the way I was being treated. I was just like, yeah, you want me to play, but you won’t actually fight for me…You say you support me, but how much do you actually if you’re not advocating for me.

Maya’s step dad was afraid she would get hurt. She described her mom as having more “faith” in her. Lynn’s dad didn’t want to sign the permission card because he feared she
would get hurt. Her brothers and mom were supportive. She was able to eventually
convince her dad to sign the permission card. Emily’s grandparents were also afraid she
would get hurt playing baseball, but did not express concern that her brother would get
hurt. However, her brother was very supportive of her playing baseball. Playing baseball
together was a bonding experience for them. Emily said her brother:

…never batted an eye that I was a girl. It’s like it didn’t phase him…The fact that
he didn’t care that I was different meant the world to me. I didn’t care what
anybody else thought as long as my brother supported and accepted me it was
cool.

Quinn stated her mom was not supportive of her playing baseball. But her grandparents
were supportive and attended her games. Quinn described her mom as more pragmatic
because she recognized there might be an opportunity to attend college through a softball
scholarship.

The support they did receive as girls playing baseball was impactful. Breanna
remembered the mothers of her teammates yelling, “Girl power!” when she came up to
bat. It was the first time she experienced support beyond her own parents in her pursuit of
baseball. Debra described her coach as also being a “friend” and “mentor” for life. He
sent her letters when she was on the road as an adult professional athlete and helped her
train. Neva described how the support of adults was liberating for her as an athlete:

My dad countless times, with no shame, would walk over to parents and be like,
“That’s my daughter. Shut up.” That was really cool because I think it’s also, if
you’ve ever played a sport at a high level, everyone will say mental toughness is
important. And that’s something that you don’t really want to be thinking about
during a game. Or, at a crucial moment in a game…I knew my parents would
stand up for me. Or, my coach would stand up for me. And, it was more of I’m
going to focus on what I’m doing on the field.
Participants had fond memories of moments when teammates and coaches were supportive. When an opposing team made comments about Frances, her teammates wanted revenge. The coach directed them to seek their revenge on the field and made Frances the starting pitcher even though a teammate had been scheduled to start the game. Frances remembered pitching a shutout with her teammates backing her up offensively and defensively.

Sarah also remembered the support of her teammates. She had a vivid memory of getting hit by the ball and going to the emergency room. It could have been a negative experience that pushed her out of baseball. However, it was a defining experience in a different way. She remembered:

…sitting there in the ER and in comes my whole team. My coach. All the guys come in. They had saved the game ball for me. And they had all signed the game ball. And they gave me the ball. They’re like, “You’re so tough. That was amazing. Let’s get back. We want you back for the next game.” The memory sticks out to me because of that support. It was a struggle to play baseball as the only girl on the team…I was their teammate. It’s a really positive memory that sticks out to me. That they cared. That I was part of the team. They accepted me as one of them. And they were there for me. And they came back and they were saying, “Dang you’re tough. You took a ball to the face! Wow. Let me see your stitches.”

Sometimes the support meant even more as they got older and reflected upon it. A former All-Star player in the AAGPBL sometimes came to Jackie’s games when she was growing up. Jackie said:

When I was younger I don’t think I really knew or fully grasped it. I distinctly remember the games that she came to and watched. I have a picture of us from when I was 14 when she came to watch.

The support they received was sometimes not readily apparent. Participants related that as adults they were told stories about how adults in their support circle had actively
worked for their right play baseball from behind-the-scenes. By not telling them about the battles they had to fight, these adults were trying to protect them. As girls they were not always aware of resistance to their participation. Toni found out her dad “secretly” went to the town hall. She said he had to go to:

…basically fight for me to play. I ended up getting to play baseball. And, I had no idea any of that happened…Luckily I wasn’t exposed to that much discrimination…he fought for me. And, he never told me.

Neva said her parents were:

…sticking up for me when I didn’t know that they needed to. Because, you’re 10, 11-years-old. You don’t really know what the conversations are, or what they are talking about and to have people who are willing to step in and stop those conversations is really awesome.

Abby later found out about an incident at her school where her mom volunteered:

…these moms were talking about how this girl had made the team and made the league over their son. And they were obviously up in arms speaking not very fondly that their boys got overlooked for a girl. And, my mom being the proud mom that she was looked at them, and smiled and said, “Yeah, and that girl is my daughter.”

Sometimes parents took preemptive action in support of their daughters playing baseball.

Before her daughter entered high school, Cassie’s mom contacted the high school and asked if her daughter playing on the baseball team would be a problem. In high school Jackie did some pitching as a preemptive action. If anyone in an authority position told her that she had to switch sports to play with girls, she and her mom could make a case that as a baseball pitcher throwing overhand, softball was not an equivalent sport:

It wasn’t so much in my mind. It was more or less in my mom’s mind than mine. I know she had heard stories from people in the past. Somebody had told her that I should probably start pitching. Because if that was ever a case or an issue that would be the separator.
Although Zina did not feel like she was openly discriminated against, she surmised there may have been more to it than she was aware of as a girl:

I felt like I never had a problem with boys or men in general saying I didn’t belong on the field. My parents might have heard chatter. If they did, they never told me. I thought it was overall a positive experience.

**Summary Theme 3: Small Circle of Support**

Participants had a small circle of support which was limited to immediate family and perhaps a coach or teammate. Within this small circle of support, they experienced conflicting degrees of support. And, this support circle changed over time. Sometimes well-intentioned loved ones encouraged them to play softball instead.

The support they did receive was impactful. For instance, they felt liberated to keep playing baseball or focus on playing without distractions. They had fond memories of moments when they received support from coaches, parents, siblings, and teammates. In these moments, they felt accepted and validated. And, sometimes support was in the form of preemptive actions such as emails to coaches to ensure they would be allowed to continue playing.

Support was not always apparent when they were children. As adults they found out individuals in their support circle had fought battles for them that they did not know about as girls. Knowledge of these battles made a positive impact on them as adults. These situations also revealed they were not always aware of the resistance to them playing as girls. Their support circle insulated them from discrimination and reinforced a sense of confidence, strengths, and self-worth.
Theme 4: Beyond Resiliency

Support in breaking barriers can lead to positive outcomes. Participants expressed another determination and resiliency as a girl playing a “boys” sport. Resiliency and determination can be beneficial character traits throughout life. Sarah described how important playing baseball was to her:

I think the overriding feeling was that this was a game that I loved to play. I was willing to kind of get through and put up with the discouraging parts of it to keep playing the game. I think it was somehow in my soul. Or deep down somewhere I had to do it. I was going to do it for as long as I could.

Gina expanded upon the positive outcomes of being the only girl on the team, “For me it was a good lesson in toughness because I was always on the team with ‘the girl.’” For some proving themselves capable of holding their own on the field was something that was achieved in a season. For others it was an ongoing process. The impact of this necessity to be resilient has been lasting. Gina described how the pressure to perform in baseball impacted her as a girl and as an adult:

I think the biggest thing was that was the first time I felt different. And maybe self-conscious about the fact that I was different. Of trying to compensate in whatever way. Be funnier. Be louder. Be Better. More talented. And constantly trying to prove myself. I think that might be that I’m an achiever by nature.

Cassie also described her determination and persistence playing baseball. For Cassie, baseball was about more than playing a sport:

It doesn’t just mean playing the sport to me. I don’t think it ever has been. People always told me, “You can get a D-I scholarship for softball.” I always told people, like, sports isn’t always who I am. And, it’s not all of who I am. I’m not going to play softball because I have a higher purpose playing baseball. A higher purpose, teaching people to respect women.
Emily found playing baseball as the only girl contributed to her persistence as an adult woman in a male-dominated field, “My years playing baseball taught me to perform under pressure, and kind of ignore the noise, and pursue my passion no matter what anybody said.” She added, “It taught me to hang with the boys. That’s a life skill not everybody has. Now, as an adult, I’m not intimidated by hardly anybody.” Playing baseball immersed her in a male-dominated culture early and taught her skills she still uses on a daily basis.

Playing baseball made a difference in other ways. Toni was thankful she played baseball before softball because, “I was treated like an athlete. I wasn’t treated like a boy or a girl…I wasn’t babied.” She said that baseball, “instilled this sense of fearlessness in me.”

Gina concluded the lessons in resiliency were worthwhile:

I think it did go a long way in some mental toughness principles because when you’re different you’re a lot of times criticized or people try to make fun or whatever it might be. I think it just gave me thicker skin. Which in sport is something that is necessary.

Breanna also found having to prove herself in baseball became a character strength and part of her identity:

I found sanctuary on the mound. That I didn’t have anywhere else in the world. I felt so comfortable in a place where everyone else thought I would be uncomfortable. Being the only girl on the field was actually the most comfortable place I possibly could have been. Maybe because it was a challenge. Maybe because I was really good at it. Maybe because I was defying expectations, and I wouldn’t want it any other way.

Her self-confidence resonated when she added, “I *knew* I was good enough. *Oh, was I* good enough. I worked for it. I felt it in my bones.”
Toni also described how playing baseball caused her to discover her own strengths. She said, “I’m not the biggest, the strongest, the fastest. But the separation was I was fearless. And, I think that grew out of playing baseball.”

Along with a sense of determination and resilience, participants expressed feeling they needed to prove themselves as capable baseball players. This was accompanied by a great deal of pressure. Emily described how this process was gendered in baseball and how it affected her:

As a girl you have to work so much harder to prove yourself. You’re not allowed to have a bad game or make a bad play…If boys strike out or make a bad play, it’s no big deal. Nobody thinks anything of it. But, if the girl strikes out then they start to wonder, ‘What is she doing on this team?’ There was definitely an innate pressure to perform. If I didn’t meet those expectations, I felt just defeated.

Neva also felt pressure to prove herself as a girl in baseball. She described how this felt and the broader ramifications of it:

When I played with boys there was kind of an unspoken rule of like you have to prove yourself before we support you. They had to test me. They had to throw as hard as they could at me to see if I would catch it. And, if I missed, they wouldn’t let me forget it. If I was pitching, there was no way they would allow me to strike them out. Because they would be the laughing stock being struck out by a girl. I think that was a little bit difficult for both me and the boys that I was playing with because there was a little bit of added societal pressure for them as well to be better than the girl on the team.

Several participants expressed that playing baseball as a girl was transformational. For Breanna, baseball took her beyond resiliency:

There’s such a freedom in being who you are. It liberates you. In a space where most people would think it would isolate you or alienate you. It’s freed me from any of the expectations of who I’m supposed to be or ought to be.
To Zina, baseball was, “everything. It gave me confidence to step out on the field and be the only girl.”

**Summary Theme 4: Beyond Resiliency**

The participants experienced a sense of determination and resiliency playing baseball. They were proud of their persistence playing the sport. For them, it was a lesson in toughness, fearlessness, and brought out their strengths. This made a lasting impact on their lives into adulthood.

Some participants saw themselves as part of a larger collective movement to bring about change. Several participants work in male-dominated professional careers. Playing on all-boy baseball teams infused them with practical skills they use daily as adults. They found they gained confidence and an ability to not be intimidated. And, some participants felt they were treated more like athletes in baseball than softball and not “babied.”

A common experience of playing baseball as a girl was feeling the need to prove their competency on the baseball field. This feeling was accompanied by pressure which could be negative or positive. The boys they played with and against experienced pressure to perform well against the girl. This pressure to perform revealed the persistence of essentialist beliefs about boys and girls. These essentialist beliefs presented barriers for them to overcome. For some participants, baseball took them beyond resiliency into transformation. The experience could liberate them to excel beyond gendered expectations. Or, it could feel like defeat if they did not measure up. Within this context, softball was freedom for some girls. For others, it was resignation.
Additional Findings

Participants remembered being told repeatedly to play softball. When it came to softball there were a full range of responses, impressions, and opinions. Abby played both baseball and softball at elite levels. In comparing the two sports she said:

It’s kind of like, in a way I can make an analogy is similar to tennis and racquetball. Obviously, you use a racket and you hit a ball, but it’s different. Or badminton. Yes, it’s a racket and there’s an object that you hit, but it’s obviously a different game.

Quinn also played baseball and softball at elite levels. She said:

Unfortunately, it’s always, in comparison, softball…When they’re two completely different sports. Softball is a fast, fast paced game. The pitching dominates. You’ve got a split second to make a decision on defense…With a different strategy… In baseball, it’s much more open. And, kind of slow paced. You have more time to think about what you need to do.

Some participants enjoyed the faster pace of softball. Other participants preferred the cerebral elements of baseball. They felt the slower pace gave them more opportunity to relish the strategy of the game. Several participants described baseball as more competitive than softball, however, they emphasized that softball is a competitive sport.

Both Quinn and Abby played college softball. They both stated they liked softball but did not love it. The final year of Little League Quinn’s coach told the team they would be playing on the bigger field the next year. Quinn said, “I decided not to go over to that field. I took a couple of years off.” As a freshman in high school she picked up a softball for the first time. Although she earned a scholarship and played professional softball, she said of the game, “I didn’t love it, but I liked it.”
On the other hand, Gina, a college softball coach, said, “I do think there’s more similarities than there’s not. I hate when people say that they’re completely different sports.” She recognized the cultures of the games are different in ways. Gina enjoyed the “constant energy” of softball.

Abby described her initial experience with softball as “culture shock.” She felt that softball was more about social relationships than baseball. Emily and Maya described the boys openly flirting with them on the base paths while playing baseball. This suggested heteronormativity and essentialism in the culture of baseball. By flirting with these girls, the boys exhibited the presumption they were heterosexual and asserted their privilege as boys to take initiative in asserting their sexual interest in them. None of the participants talked about girl teammates hitting on them in softball.

Participants described additional cultural differences between baseball and softball. Some participants did not like the chanting in softball. Some did not want to wear bows in their hair or makeup which was part of the softball culture. Some had to wear shorts instead of pants playing softball which they found to be impractical. Kelly had to wear jeans playing fast pitch softball which she found to be “impractical” in the summer heat. Maya described dugout culture in baseball as “gross” with common behaviors such as spitting. Participants consistently described baseball culture as emotionally reserved. In comparison, they described softball culture as more supportive and demonstrative. Breanna discovered, “I love the softball culture. I think it’s built around having fun and enjoying each other’s company and working as a unit.” She said, “I think baseball’s antiquated,” because baseball is, “still largely owned by older white
men who aren’t as progressive and aren’t doing things that could really make the league better.”

Maya found softball liberating because she was allowed to play different positions instead of being relegated to the outfield. This meant she experienced greater opportunities in softball. To her playing outfield in baseball was boring. She thought her baseball coaches treated her differently and had lower expectations of her athletic performance. She said:

I never had to worry about the girls hitting on me or something. Or, I never had to worry about feeling inferior. Like I couldn’t do certain stuff because I was a girl. I don’t think it so much came from the coaches, other than the fact they wouldn’t let me hit. Even the boys themselves. They never expected me to do any huge plays or anything like that.

For Maya, playing on an all-boys’ team made her appreciate being on an all-girls’ team. She found her confidence soared in softball because she felt part of the team. Both Zina and Maya described softball as having more team camaraderie. Zina said, “I felt like I belonged more on a women’s team. I guess. At the same time, I didn’t feel like I didn’t belong on a men’s team.”

Some participants never played softball and some who tried softball described hating it. Others found the transition difficult but learned to appreciate both games and their teammates. Emily described the transition:

When I switched to softball, my senior year of high school, it was the hardest thing I’ve ever done. Because I went from being one of the better players on the team to absolutely sucking because I could not hit the ball. I’m sure you know it’s totally different. That was really, really hard.
Emily detailed the manner in which hitting and muscle memory were different between the two sports. She shared her understanding of the different cultures of the two games:

> Softball is just much more intimate than baseball is. Even physically, the bases are closer, the distance on the field is much more intimate and that is true for the entire game in all aspects of it.

Neva concurrently played on a travel, all-girls’ baseball team and a school softball team. However, she said, “It’s a different strategy. It’s a different mindset when you’re on the field.” She played the same positions in both sports. She said:

> For me at least, mentality, it was really tough going back and forth, because the strategy is a little bit different. And, playing first base and playing catcher, they’re crucial players on the field. If your mind isn’t in the right space or if you’re not thinking the right thing, then you kind of screw it up for the rest of your team if you’re in the wrong place or you do the wrong thing.

Jackie also played similar positions in both sports. However, she did not have a difficult time making the adjustments. She said, “It wasn’t bad at all. It was a little different.”

Zina did not remember the transition being difficult. However, she pitched in baseball and said, “I could never pitch in softball.” She also described defensively having more time to react to the ball coming off the bat in baseball.

Several participants described the emotional difficulty of giving up baseball to switch to softball. According to Valerie, she felt like her, “soul was dying,” when she switched to softball. She said, “it was like torture.” Valerie clarified, “When you’re 12 it’s fairly easy to feel like your soul’s dying when you have to let go of something you love doing…” Valerie learned to enjoy softball. For a time, she played professional softball. However, it did not pay enough for her to earn a living so she had to give up softball too.
Breanna transitioned to softball because of her dad’s influence. Emotionally she resisted because she had been told to play softball her whole life. At first, she said, “I hated every second of it.” She learned to adapt and enjoyed her teammates. She found they were great athletes. She remembered, “Quitting baseball was hard. That was like the hardest thing I probably had to do. Because I didn’t want to, at all. That was painful. I didn’t like that.” She added, “It was painful leaving the sport that I love, but it freed me from dealing with the crap that you deal with when you’re the only girl on the field.”

Summary of Additional Findings

Softball meant different things to different participants. They readily identified differences and similarities between the two games. Participants described differences in uniforms, behavior, social interactions, and expectations. Some had a strong preference for baseball. Others preferred softball. One participant never played softball.

For some, softball liberated them from being the only girl on the field. They found their confidence soared and enjoyed a greater sense of camaraderie. This made them appreciate being on an all girls’ team in softball. Some participants found the transition from baseball to softball emotionally painful. And, others found the transition of skills from baseball to softball an agonizing, unwanted change. Others had few difficulties making the emotional and skill adjustments. It was common for participants to experience the transition as a mix of good and bad. Some participants learned to love softball. Others did not. Significantly, they did not view the games as necessarily interchangeable.
CHAPTER V.
DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

In this section, the meanings adults ascribed to their experiences playing baseball as girls and whether they considered softball to be an equivalent sport will be considered in more depth. Next, the implications of these findings will be discussed. Finally, recommendations for future research will be elaborated in more detail.

Discussion

The data reflected the complexities and intersections experienced by girls who play baseball. On one hand, they are a member of a team. However, as the only girl they stand out as “different” from their teammates. Coercive gender segregated sports have normalized masculine and feminine hegemony because the construct of gender is presumed to be unchanging, natural, and oppositional within the structure (McDonagh & Pappano, 2008; Milner & Braddock, 2016).

By disrupting gender segregation to play a sport deemed for boys, girls defy hegemony and the gender binary. Intersections such as class, race, and the perception athletic girls are “lesbian” are among the complex barriers. The gender landscape is complicated which contributed to different girls from different backgrounds having very different experiences, responses to those experiences, and different perceptions upon reflection. However, every participant except one experienced being the only girl on her team and negotiated the perception girls are inferior athletes.
A persistent message sent to people who are “othered” is that they are unwanted and don’t belong. This data also reflected how these women navigated these barriers. Participants reported a strong sense of resiliency as they navigated being the only girl. They experienced feeling different and pressure to prove themselves good enough to play with the boys. There was a perception that to play baseball there were attitudes and resistance they would have to face. Some responded with determination to prove they were good enough. Others found an all-girls’ softball team was a more comfortable, safe place to pursue sport.

To persist playing baseball was a struggle. Therefore, a support circle was essential. Participants reported a small circle of support which typically consisted of parent(s), sibling(s), grandparents, and/or a coach or teammate. However, even within this support circle there were conflicting levels of support. As they got older sometimes adults within their support circle encouraged them to give up baseball. This was often done with good intentions. Their support circle contributed to resiliency.

Determination and resiliency were positive character traits frequently reported as part of the baseball playing experience of girls. Several participants voiced how playing baseball as the only girl transformed their lives. Transformation is the ultimate positive outcome of engaging in recreation and sport. According to Henderson (2013) the negative approach of constraints can be transformed into a positive position of empowerment that may change discriminatory systems (Henderson, 2013). This transformative approach creates opportunities for girls to get involved with social justice activities to promote social, cultural, and individual change (Rauscher & Cooky, 2015).
Individual transformation is powerful. Collective transformation is game changing. So far, this has not occurred for girls playing baseball in the United States.

One of the most significant reasons it has not been normalized for girls to play baseball is the creation of softball for girls. As early as the 1920s softball was held up as the girls’ version of baseball (Palmer, 1929). This was institutionalized when Little League Baseball created Little League Softball for girls after losing the Maria Pepe case in 1974 (Ring, 2009b). Every participant discussed their attitudes and feelings toward softball in their descriptions of their baseball experience. And, they indicated that they do not necessarily view softball as an equivalent sport. Overall, participants had a range of feelings and thoughts regarding softball ranging from hate to love.

Implications

The meaning of baseball in the lives of participants has a number of implications for professionals and educators. Because recreation, leisure, and sport professionals interact with a diverse people on a daily basis, an understanding of basic sociological concepts is important. A foundation of knowledge about how gender, race, class, and sexuality are created within societies of people is essential. A basic sociology course should be the building block for related classes such as social psychology, programming, marketing and public relations, and management. Systemic inequalities cannot be addressed until professionals have a foundation of knowledge regarding how systemic inequalities occur and what they look like.

Human interactions are the cornerstone of the field which indicates the necessity of improved education for professionals in sociology. This foundation of knowledge is
also helpful in understanding how othering occurs in programs and employment. Recreation, leisure, and sport professionals are in key positions to disrupt othering in meaningful ways which leads to authentic inclusion, personal growth, and transformation.

The programming practice of segregating sports by gender at a young age is problematic. Participants voiced that there is benefit in boys and girls playing baseball as teammates and learning to be supportive of each other. Individual participants are often not easily reducible to binary gender or sex categories. For this reason, gender or sex check boxes should be eliminated from registration forms. The gender segregation of pre-adolescent youth sport programs is especially problematic. Registration forms are often the first line of opposition to girls playing baseball. To enhance opportunities, programs must be marketed without gender markers such as “boys’ baseball” or “girls’ tee ball.” The elimination of these boxes would be beneficial to transgender athletes too. Marketing materials should feature the images of gender nonconforming youth to truly communicate inclusiveness.

The growing awareness of the need for inclusion and persistent inequities is impacting youth sport programs. Authentic inclusion ensures participants will be enriched by the programs. This can be perceived as an onerous weight or an opportunity. Coaches, youth sport leaders, and volunteers must be trained to handle issues of race, gender, sexuality, and class. This would include training volunteers to never question the gender or sex of a participant and not to make comments like “you throw like a girl” or “man up.” Such phrases as “throw like a girl” and “man up” should fall into disuse
among coaches and league officials because they reinforce harmful hegemonies. Professionals have a responsibility to advocate to meet the needs of all youth.

The participants were positively impacted by adults and peers who advocated on their behalf. It was common for participants to report discovering later in life how adults quietly fought battles so they could play baseball. What if adults openly advocated for girls? What if they had a larger circle of support? Because professionals in the field are engaged in a fundamental way with members of the community on a daily basis, it is essential for professionals to have a basic understanding of social constructs. Every student majoring in recreation, sport, non-profit administration, and leisure should be required to successfully complete a basic sociology class. To discuss racism, sexism, homophobia, and classism without a basic understanding of key sociological concepts is fundamentally problematic. Recreation, sport, non-profit administration, and leisure professionals have a responsibility to be inclusive in providing services.

The National Alliance for Youth Sports (2020) in partnership with Ripken Baseball provides training for tee ball and baseball coaches. The curriculum emphasizes teaching good sportsmanship. Future coaches are told that if athletes on their team do not learn good sportsmanship, everything else a coach has done has been a waste of time. Fostering an inclusive, supportive environment is part of good sportsmanship. Opportunities to participate are an important part of the equation too.

According to Travers (2008), girls who excel at baseball should have opportunities to play with boys as they get older. There is still a need for opportunities for girls to play on all girls’ baseball teams due to historical and persistent inequalities in the
training, funding, coaching, and opportunities. Youth who identify voluntarily as girls, and want to be play on an all-girls’ team should have that option whenever feasible. Scholars have envisioned different ways to categorize sport to eliminate gender, sexuality, and sex discrimination that results from sport categorization. Kane (1995) envisioned athletic performance and skill along a continuum. Martinkova (2020a, 2020b) proposed unisex or coed sport and basing categories on weight and height not gender.

Re-envisioning sport categories empowers youth. On one hand, resiliency is a good character trait. However, feeling defeated can be immobilizing and counterproductive. One of the complexities with individual resilience is systemic inequalities and discrimination are overlooked. The onus for overcoming barriers is put on individuals without affirmation that systemic discrimination exists and change is necessary. Community parks and recreation, youth sport leagues, school physical education programs, and non-profit organizations are essential sources of support for contemporary families and youth. Girls deserve to have a wider circle of support. Collective action is necessary to change discriminatory systems. Culture and media feed discriminatory systems by normalizing inequalities.

The unequal and inferior quality of media coverage of women’s sports has been well documented (Cooky et al., 2015; Messner et al., 2000; Musto et al., 2017; Weber & Carini, 2012). And, sport broadcasters, editors, and owners are overwhelmingly white and male (Lapchick, 2018). ESPN has an online presence for women’s sports, espnW. The network has nine cable networks (ESPN, 2020). The network should dedicate one of these channels to 24/7 coverage of women’s sports with all-women broadcasting and
production teams. BIPOC and LGBTQ+ women must be hired and promoted to decision making positions. An all-women’s network would be the perfect showcase to broadcast the World Cup of Women’s Baseball and a variety of women’s sports. This would create sponsorship opportunities, revenue, and renumeration for professional women athletes. Making women athletes visible provides a platform for growing social movements as evidenced by the US Women’s soccer team, WNBA, and tennis player Naomi Osaka utilizing their platforms to call for justice for Breonna Taylor and other women of color. This platform also gives girls something to aspire to in sports.

In addition, *Sports Illustrated*, Yahoo Sports, FOX Sports, and other top media sport media platforms must commit to hiring and promoting with the goal of at least 50% of their editors, producers, broadcasters, and journalists being BIPOC women, LGBTQ+, differently abled, and members of underrepresented groups. In addition, total content should include at least 50% women’s sports. Each media platform can work towards this goal by hiring and empowering diversity and inclusion specialists to change policies.

Kalev et al. (2006) found diversity training did not bring about change in hiring and promoting a more diverse workforce. Mentorship programs primarily benefited white women. What did bring about greater diversity in employment was hiring trained diversity and inclusion professionals and empowering them to implement changes in policies. According to Kalev et al. (2006), these specialists should be responsible for reporting back to a committee and achieving measurable goals.

Measurable goals should be included in policies and laws. Title IX was enacted nearly half a century ago. Title IX should be amended to require institutions receiving
federal funds meet benchmarks in their efforts to achieve equity or enact new legislation. A spending cap on programs such as college football and men’s college basketball could contribute towards greater equity for women’s sports without eliminating men’s sports to give the appearance of equity. Toward this goal, there should be a spending cap on college coach salaries.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

How many girls have the support to persist playing a sport they enjoy despite the backlash? How many are willing to put up with it? For how long? Should they be expected to put up with it or should adults act preemptively on their behalf? This study led to additional questions warranting future research.

Individual and collective empowerment through participation in gender non-conforming activities is the subject of a growing body of research. The experiences of girls and women playing baseball needs to be researched more thoroughly because this can grant insight into such topics as resilience, discrimination, and social justice. More research needs to be done on this topic especially by BIPOC, LGBTQ+, differently abled, and people from different socioeconomic backgrounds is needed and should be supported. Black feminist, queer, and intersectional scholarship offer great insight, new perspectives, and new visions. And, the insights of underrepresented people need to be appreciated on their own merit outside historically white, male, heteronormative, upper class, academic systems.

It is important to note this study included a small and not necessarily representative sample of participants.
Summary

The participants envisioned how youth sport programs can be more beneficial.

Toni said, “all sports should be coed until puberty…that would help deconstruct sexism.”

As a youth coach, Pam had insight into diversity and inclusion. She said:

I believe that I should allow people of all diversity, whether they identify with their birth sex or not, to play the game. Because it is my belief that it is an organization’s responsibility to help develop people who can adapt well to change. And, how better to do that than to allow people who think differently and look differently than they do to be their teammates.

Several women interviewed emphasized a desire to see more encouragement and opportunities for all to play baseball and softball as opposed to discouragement for simply wanting to play a particular sport. Toni said:

I wish there was more encouragement, awareness, and opportunities for both sexes to play both sports. By any means, I wasn’t discouraged to play baseball in high school. I certainly wasn’t encouraged to play.

Jackie said, “I just hope one day it’s not an issue to have a girl on your team. It’s not a big deal. It’s just part of it.”

Participants emphasized respect for the girls and women who blazed trails in baseball. They also expressed frustration that it has been necessary to blaze the same trails over and over. Valerie said:

I’m obviously happy for the opportunities that the Title IX movement has set out. But I would like to see it shift from, okay, the male sports budget has this much, so the female sports budget needs to have this much. I want it to go deeper than that. I would like our society to appreciate and encourage and support female athletes to the same degree they do males.
The first participant interviewed proudly identified as an early trailblazer in baseball for girls nearly 40 years ago. She stated, “I was a trailblazer.” One of the last participants interviewed started her baseball journey 30 years later and stated, “I am a trailblazer.” As long as girls and boys do not see girls playing baseball, the baseball gender binary is reified along with the subsequent inequalities. Girls playing baseball disrupts the gender segregation of sport. Gender segregation of sport reifies hegemony and inequality. Without structural change, girls who pursue baseball will continue to face barriers.

The experiences shared through this research will contribute to the dialogue about girls and women in baseball. This research may also contribute to the dialogue about disruption of inequalities and discrimination. Finally, this research may contribute towards the development of a model for sport participation free of gender barriers.
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https://www.law.cornell.edu/constitution/amendmentxiv


APPENDIX A

Interview Questions

1. Tell me about your baseball playing experience.
2. How did baseball play a role in your life?
3. Tell me about your last year playing baseball.
4. To what degree is baseball a part of your life today?
5. Tell me about anything else you think is important for me to know.
6. Do you know any women who played baseball as girls who might be interested in participating in this study?

Any additional questions will be probing questions to encourage the participant to reflect, provide more detail and description, and context for their experience.

Possible Follow-Up Questions

1. How did you feel?
2. What do you remember?
3. What was it like being the only girl?
4. Is there anything else you remember?
5. What was practice like?
APPENDIX B

Informed Consent Form

UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN IOWA

HUMAN PARTICIPANT'S REVIEW

Project Title: GOING, GOING, GONE! REASONS GIRLS CEASED PARTICIPATION IN BASEBALL

Name of Investigator: AJ Richard

Dear Participant:

You are invited to participate in this research project conducted through the University of Northern Iowa. The following information is provided to help you make an informed decision about whether or not to participate.

The purpose of this study is to explore the baseball playing experiences of girls. This information may empower baseball coaches, league administrators, youth workers, parents, and school officials to remove the barriers preventing girls from playing their sport of choice. It may also enable practitioners to recognize potential constraints and create an inclusive team environment.

The researcher will seek participants through social media, flyers, and contacts with coaches and other players. Participation is voluntary. Participants will be American women over age 18 who played baseball as a member of an organized team and stopped playing by age 18. The researcher will interview participants. The researcher will provide a letter of consent and will only proceed with an interview once the participant has read, understood, and signed the letter of consent. The interview will take place at a mutually agreed upon location and time or over the phone. If the interview takes place over the phone, the interviewer will be the only person in the room on her end of the phone. The interview will consist of a few open-ended questions. Participants will be encouraged to describe their baseball playing experience. Participants can choose not to answer all or some of the questions. The participant can choose to terminate the interview at any time. The interview will take one to two hours to complete. It will be audio recorded and later transcribed into text. The researcher will take field notes during the interviews. Once the interview is transcribed, the researcher will share the transcription with the participant.
and ask if the participant wants to add, change, or delete anything, before the data is analyzed and coded. The researcher may contact the participant with follow-up questions. There will be no compensation or direct benefits for participants.

The interview is confidential and anonymous. The researcher may request your name and demographic information such as age, geographic location, and race. After the interview, the researcher will replace your name with an unrelated pseudonym to preserve your privacy. Demographic information will be separated from the interview questions and the name of the participant will be replaced with a code. The interviews, audio recordings, field notes, and demographic information will be stored in a locked cabinet that only the researcher will have access to. The de-identified research data may be shared in publication, classrooms, and presentations, and may be shared with other researchers for future research. The data may also be used later in other research studies. The audio recordings and field notes will be kept no longer than one year before being destroyed. If the participant’s interview is observed by others, the researcher can make no guarantees of confidentiality.

The study risks are minimal, although you may feel some discomfort answering questions about your baseball playing experience. Participants may decline to answer a question or discontinue the interview at any time.

Your participation is completely voluntary. You are free to withdraw from participation at any time or to choose not to participate at all, and by doing so, you will not be penalized in any way.

If you have questions regarding your participation in this study or about the study, please contact AJ Richard at 319-480-8673 (amatulla@uni.edu) or the researcher’s faculty advisor, Dr. Kathy Scholl, at 319-273-6316 (kathleen.scholl@uni.edu) at the College of Education, University of Northern Iowa. For answers to questions about the rights of research participants and the research review process at UNI, you may contact the office of the IRB Administrator at 319-273-6148.

I am fully aware of the nature and extent of my participation in this research as stated above and the possible risks arising from it. I hereby agree to participate in this research. I acknowledge that I have received a copy of this consent statement. I am 18 years of age or older.

_______________________________ _____________________
(Signature of participant)    (Date)

_______________________________
(Printed name of participant)
*The participant receives one copy of the consent form. The researcher receives one copy for her records. Signed consent forms must be maintained for inspection for at least 3 years after the end of the study activities.
APPENDIX C

Invitation to Participate: Social Media

Facebook and LinkedIn

Seeking American women 18 and older, who played baseball as a member of a team and ceased participation by the age of 18, to participate in a research study. The study is being done to gain insight into the baseball playing experiences of girls. Participants will be interviewed by the researcher. Interviews are anticipated to take 2-3 hours. Participation is voluntary. There is no compensation for participants. Interviews are confidential. Only the researcher will have access to identifying information about participants.

If you are interested in setting up an interview, or for more information, please contact AJ Richard.

Thank you for your time and interest!

AJ Richard
Graduate Student
University of Northern Iowa
Leisure, Youth and Human Services
College of Education
WRC 217
Cedar Falls, IA 50614
Email: amatulla@uni.edu
Phone: 319-480-8673

Twitter

Seeking Am. Women who played baseball as kids for research study. For more info: amatulla@uni.edu or 319-480-8673. Thanks!
APPENDIX D

Institutional Review Board Form

UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN IOWA
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD (IRB)
Standard Application for Human Participants Review

Instructions for Submission:
2. Review training requirements at http://www.un-iow.edu/irb training.
3. Download and complete most current form version at http://www.un-iow.edu/irb forms.
4. In order for this form to save your changes, you must open it directly using Adobe Acrobat Reader (or Acrobat Professional/Adobe DC), not through an Internet browser. If it was automatically opened by your browser, close it, go back, and download/save the form onto your computer, and then open it using Adobe Reader or Professional.
5. Attach requested supplementary documents ("attach" button found in Comments view, or combine into separate Word or PDF files.
6. Email document(s) to irb@uiowa.edu. If you are a student, you must ask your advisor in the email.
7. Submission of this application indicates that the Principal Investigator (PI) and Faculty Advisor (if student PI) acknowledge they are responsible for ensuring that all personnel comply with university requirements and federal regulations for human subjects research.

A. General Information

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<tr>
<td>PI Name</td>
<td>Nicole &quot;JJ&quot; Richards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PI Email</td>
<td><a href="mailto:anmelda@uiowa.edu">anmelda@uiowa.edu</a></td>
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Other Key Personnel

List names, emails, and departments for all other key personnel. Consult guidance for definition of key personnel. If none, list none. For higher risk studies, list training or experience relevant to the proposal activities. Also enter organization for any non-UI collaborators. Consult guidance regarding inter-institutional projects.

Dr. Anna Woodrick, anna.woodrick@uiowa.edu, SOC/ANTH/CBM
Dr. Jennifer Warner, jennifer.warner@uiowa.edu, graduate college

Do the PI and Advisor have human subjects training documentation on file? (required) ☑ yes
Do other key personnel have human subjects training documentation on file? ☑ yes

no, some are pending
8. Purpose of Research

81. Why is this research important and what are its primary purposes?
The purpose of this research is to do a phenomenological study of the baseball playing experiences of adults who were girls when they played baseball, played as the member of a team, and ceased participation by the age of 18. Very little research has been done into the phenomenon of girls playing the male-dominated sport of baseball. This research will give women who played baseball as girls an opportunity to share their experiences. The researcher will collect this data and analyze it for consistent themes.

82. What questions or hypotheses is this research designed to answer?
What are the experiences of girls who chose to play the male-dominated sport of baseball and cease participation by age 18?

83. How will the results be used or disseminated to others?
The results will be written in my master’s thesis. The results may be published or shared via classroom learning or at professional conferences.

84. If the research will involve or add onto an existing program or class activity (e.g. in action research), explain which activities are proposed as research and which already exist as normal training, class, or program activities. Clearly differentiate these in consent documents as well. Enter "Not Applicable", if this is not relevant to your study.
Not applicable.
C. Participants

C1. List each participant group (e.g., K-12 students, UNI students, Facebook users, employees, etc.) and the number of each you hope will participate. See guidance on definition of "Participants" if needed.

One participant group will consist of adults who played baseball as girls (identified as girls when they played baseball) as the member of a team and ceased participation by the age of 18.

C2. Will the study include any of the following special populations? (Check all that apply.)

- Persons in other countries
- Pregnant or nursing mothers
- Persons with limited literacy or ability to understand English
- Persons with cognitive impairments
- Persons with substance abuse or mental health problems
- Day care or K-12 students
- Adults who are incarcerated or in involuntary hospital confinement
- Youth in foster, residential and/or hospital care

C3. What characteristics (inclusion or exclusion criteria) must participants have to be in this study? (Answer for each participant group, if different.)

Must be American. Must currently be over 18 years old. Must have identified as female when playing baseball. Must have played as the member of a baseball team as a child. Must have ceased participation in baseball by the age of 18.

C4. How and when will you learn if the participants meet these criteria (if applicable)? Attach any screening instruments or tools to be used for this purpose.

When seeking participants, the criteria will be listed in all materials. The researcher will ask the potential participant to determine if the individual meets the criteria before arranging an interview. At the beginning of the interview, the researcher will ask the participant if they meet the criteria and this will be recorded.
D. Study Locations

D1. Check the types of locations where recruitment, data collection, or other study procedures will be carried out?

- ✔ UNI
- □ Other universities
- □ K-12 schools or day care centers
- □ Privately owned businesses
- ✔ Public libraries, parks, or similar sites
- □ Online or telephone only

D2. List each off-campus physical location where procedures will take place.

Recruitment will be done using email, social media, and the researcher's networks. Data collection will be done either in-person or over the phone. In addition, recruitment and interviews may be done at the following locations:
- Manchester Grand Hyatt Hotel, San Diego, CA
- Society for American Baseball Research conference, June 16-30, 2019
- Rockford, IL, Beyer Stadium, 1899 Field, and Sportscore, site of the Baseball for All Nationals July 31-August 4, 2019
Primary study procedures will be done on the UNI campus electronically.

D3. List each additional organization, team, or entity that will provide assistance or permissions for the project and what will be provided (e.g., mailing lists, permission to access information, permission to post invitation, etc.)

Permission to post invitations will be sought from Baseball for All, Women Belong in Baseball, the International Women’s Baseball Center, Red Sox Women’s Fantasy Baseball Camp, Yankees Women Fantasy Baseball Camp, Los Angeles Dodgers, DC Force, East Bay Dales, Minnesota Lynx baseball Association, American Women Professional baseball League Players’ Association, and the society for American baseball Research. Women Belong in Baseball has agreed to share an email list for recruitment of potential participants.

Consult guidance on Letters of Cooperation, which are required from most external study locations and/or cooperating organizations.

E. Study Recruitment (Inviting Participation)

E1. Check all recruitment procedures to be used, and attach the text for each. If you will use the same text for more than one method, indicate that in the title of the attached materials.

- ✔ In person or phone recruitment (attach script or bullet points)
- ✔ Email/text invitations sent by the PI or research team (attach email/text)
- ✔ Email/text invitations forwarded by others (attach emails)
- □ Letter invitation (attach letters)
- □ Online posting (attach texts)
- □ Flyers or handouts (attach flyers)
- □ Reminder invitations (attach texts)
E2. Explain how these recruitment procedures will be implemented (e.g., in which order they will occur and for how long or how many times, for each group of participants). Also explain how individuals will communicate their interest in participating.

1. The researcher has 3 names shared by colleagues who know women who played baseball as girls. These individuals will be contacted via private messenger on social media and email. Invitations will be sent on social media (see E1). Emails will be sent to individuals on the Women Belong in Baseball email list. Some people who receive the invitations may share them with others. 4. Flyers may be made and distributed on campus or shared at the SABR conference in San Diego and the Baseball For All tournament in Rockford, IL. The researcher may identify potential participants while attending these events through conversations. 5. If the researcher does not identify enough participants additional posts may be made on social media and a reminder invitation emailed to the list.

E3a. Will you invite potential participants to be in the study when others may be nearby?

✓ yes  ☐ no

E3b. If yes, indicate whether or not it is necessary to keep private the individual’s decision about whether or not to participate (e.g., because they are members of a stigmatized group or because they may feel uncomfortable for any reason saying yes or no). If this is a concern, explain what procedures you will use to keep the decision private.

The researcher may invite individuals at the SABR conference in San Diego and the Baseball For All tournament in Rockford, IL while engaged in conversation. The researcher will let the potential participant know about the research study and invite the individual to contact her if they are interested in possibly participating, or setup an interview.

E4a. What relationship, if any, is there between the potential participants and the PI and/or any other members of the research team?

☐ no relationship
☐ personal friends or family
✓ students
☐ employees
☐ other (describe below)

E4b. If applicable, how will you reduce any perceived pressure to participate resulting from this relationship? See guidance on indirect recruitment methods. (Note: third party recruitment no longer required in K-12 action research.)

Some of the participants may be acquaintances of the researcher. Potential participants may be involved in baseball organizations the researcher is also involved with such as SABR, Baseball For All, the International Women’s Baseball Center, and the All-American Girls Professional Baseball Players’ Association. The relationship would be a casual one and not a personal one. Students or faculty at UNH may respond to flyers or word-of-mouth to voluntarily participate in the study.
F. Data Collection

F1. Check all data collection procedures to be used:

☐ paper questionnaires, surveys, or tests (attach instruments)
☐ online questionnaires, surveys, or tests (attach instruments)
☐ in-person interviews or focus groups (attach initial questions)
☐ phone or online interviews (attach initial questions)
☐ collection of artifacts (e.g. photos, worksamples or essays)
☐ review of existing datasets or records

☐ collection of analysis of biological samples
☐ behavior observation
☐ physical activities or interventions

F2. Explain how these procedures will be implemented step by step (e.g., in which order they will occur and how long they will take, for each group of participants). Numbering or bullet points are encouraged. If you are accessing records, explain what is in the records, how you will obtain them, and how you will use the data.

1. There is one group of potential participants for this research. Interviews will either be done in-person or over the phone. Interviews will be scheduled after the researcher verifies the potential participant is voluntarily interested in participating and meets the criteria. 2. Interviews will be audio recorded. 3. During face-to-face interviews, the researcher will observe body language and may make notes of body language or behavior observation in a field notebook. 4. The interviews are anticipated to be one hour to three hours in duration. 5. The researcher will type transcripts of the recorded interviews so there will be a hard copy.

F3. Check each type of compensation that will be provided to participants.

☐ no compensation will be offered
☐ cash or gift cards
☐ food or gifts
☐ low or no cost services
☐ course credit (non-research alternatives must also be offered)
☐ other ________
F4. Explain how, when, and how much compensation will be provided (e.g., will all participants receive it, by lottery, or after completion of specific tasks). University business procedures may apply. Consult guidance on Compensation for Participants.

No compensation is being offered. Participants may find sharing their baseball experience to be enjoyable. Participants may enjoy having someone listen to their baseball experience.

G. Risks and Benefits

G1. Check all potential risks that may be associated with your project at some level:

- inconvenience or time (all studies have this)
- emotional discomfort, stress, or distress
- risks to privacy or dignity
- risks to social reputation
- legal risks
- financial risks
- physical injury or illness
- other (describe below)

G2. Explain how likely or serious each of the risks are, and if possible, what steps you will take to minimize them, including how to address any negative impacts that do happen to occur during or after participation. It is not generally possible to remove all risk or inconvenience from study participation, so the goal is simply to minimize risks to the extent possible and otherwise inform the participants about them. For studies involving physical activity, describe and attach emergency action plan.

Participants will experience an inconvenience or loss of time by participating in the research. Participants may experience emotional discomfort, stress, or distress when sharing their memories of their baseball experience. The researcher will make clear the interview is voluntary and the participant can stop at any time and can change their minds. The researcher will be patient and will give participants time to share or not share what is their choice. The researcher will give each participant an informed letter of consent which will outline the participants rights to privacy, confidentiality, and the right to withdraw from participation at any time. Each participant will have a copy of this letter to keep. The researcher will keep all identifying data either locked in a file cabinet or password protected on a computer. Only the researcher will have access to the key and passwords. The actions taken to protect the participants privacy will also protect their social reputation. Interviews will be scheduled at a time and place agreed upon by the researcher and participant will confidentiality in mind (a private place where the conversation will not be overheard). When conducting phone interviews the researcher will be sitting alone in a room with all doors shut so no one can overhear the conversation. The informed consent letter will include phone numbers the participant may chose to call in the event they experience emotional discomfort, or mental stress or distress. The numbers will be numbers which can be called if one is seeking help dealing with such issues.
G3. If the project includes any special populations (as noted in Item C2), discuss special risks and procedures for mitigating them. Also explain any special procedures to ensure consent will be fully understood and voluntary.

The researcher is not seeking to include special populations noted in G2. The researcher will provide each participant with an informed consent letter (see attached). The participant will be asked to read the letter prior to the interview. The researcher will sign 2 copies of the letter and ask the participant to sign the 2 copies also, after the letter has been read. The researcher will give one copy of the letter to the participant to keep and will keep one letter on file in a secured cabinet. Prior to the interview, the researcher will remind the participant their participation is voluntary and they can choose to not answer any questions or to withdraw at any time. They may also change their mind about their participation by contacting the researcher and lettering them know. The participant will be verbally informed of their rights to confidentiality and assured any information shared in the interview will be kept confidential. Any identifiers will be removed or a pseudonym used instead of their actual name. Before beginning the interview, the researcher will ask the participant if they understand this. This will be audio recorded along with the interview.

G4. Sometimes in your research, you might discover information about your participants that are a potential problem for them or others (e.g. substance abuse, suicidal behavior, abuse). UNI policy and Iowa law may require that you report any child abuse, and you may need to report other types of abuse or behavior based on your status as a mandatory reporter and/or your personal ethics. How will you handle these types of information?

If this information becomes known to the researcher, the researcher will inform the participant of UNI policy and/or Iowa law in that situation. The researcher will handle these situations as outlined by UNI policy and Iowa law.

G5. In some studies, participants cannot be told in advance what the study is about, or there may be other elements of deception or omission that are necessary. If this item is not applicable, indicate that below. If this project does require some type of deception or omission, please explain a) why this is needed; and b) how, when, and by whom participants will be fully informed. Attach debriefing script or text.

Not applicable to this study.
G6. Describe the **anticipated benefits** of this research for individual participants. If none, state "None". Note: study compensation is not a benefit.

Some participants may find sharing their baseball experience to an active listener enjoyable. No other benefits are anticipated.

G7. Describe the anticipated benefits of this research for the field or society, and explain how the benefits outweigh the risks.

Very little research has been done regarding the experiences of girls playing baseball. The researcher has found no previous research into the reasons girls cease participation in baseball. By researching this topic, insight can be gained. This insight and knowledge may empower leisure service providers, coaches, and parents to maximize the benefits and opportunities for girls playing baseball. The knowledge may lead researchers and leisure service professionals to develop strategies to better serve girls who play baseball.

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**H. Confidentiality**

In most studies, **confidentiality of participant identities or data** is necessary and appropriate, but not always. How you handle such information will depend on your study design and the risks/benefits to participants. What IS necessary is that this information be clearly described in your consent documents (except in cases of deception or omission).

**H1. Check all types of identifying information that will be collected in this study:**

- Direct IDs such as name, address, phone/email, student ID, SSN, etc.
- Indirect IDs such as race, gender, grade in school, etc.
- IP addresses (collected by online survey programs - **indicate below if you will remove them**)
- Photographs or videos
- Audio recordings
- No direct or indirect identifiers will be obtained or recorded - study will be entirely anonymous **(Skip to Question H4.)**

**H2. If identifiers are involved, will they be shared with anyone outside of the research team, and if so, with whom? Indicate which information, and how and when this will occur. For example, it may be appropriate to report results by grade, gender, or county of residence.**

The researcher will have contact information for each participant. This may be a phone number or email address along with the participant's name. The researcher will know the participant's race, gender, and other identifying information such as geographic location. Audio recordings will be made of the interviews. All of the participants will have identified as female when they played baseball. All participants will be American. The participant's age, time period when they played baseball, race, and geographic location may be included in data shared through classroom learning experiences, publication, and at conferences. Their identity will be protected by using pseudonyms rather than their actual names. Also, their geographic location will only be shared in a general way. For instance, if a participant lives in Iowa, the information shared would be "from a small Midwestern town."
H3. If it is important to keep identifying information and study data confidential, how will that be done? (This might include procedures such as keeping the identifiers separate from the data, using password protected files, destroying identifying data or tapes at the end of the study, disguising faces on videos, etc.)

Identifiers will be kept separate from data. Transcripts will use pseudonyms and generalized identifying information such as “played in the 1970s” and “from a large city on the East Coast” rather than specific identifiers such as “played from 1976-1978” and “played in Boston”. Audio recordings and identifying information will be kept in a locked file or a password protected file. Only the researcher will have the key and the passwords. Recordings will not be shared outside the research team. After one year, the recordings and identifying information will be destroyed.

H4. How long will you keep the study data or artifacts?

After one year, identifying information will be destroyed. Transcripts with pseudonyms and generalized identifying information may be kept indefinitely.

H5. Is it possible that the study data might be analyzed in new studies in the future, by you or others?

☐ yes (include this in consent documents) ☐ no

I. Consent Process

Consent that is fully informed and voluntary is a basic standard for research and thus a waiver of consent is uncommon. In most cases, it is also important to document the consent process on a form with signatures. However, in some studies, such as phone or online surveys, or with special populations, obtaining signatures is not appropriate and the IRB will waive documentation of consent. Important: Consult the Informed Consent Checklist to ensure all required items are included. If the study involves children, see Research with Children and Youth and Research in K-12 Educational Settings.

1. Which consent process(es) will be used in this study? (Check all that apply.)

☐ written signed consent form for adults
☐ written signed student assent
☐ written signed parental permission forms
☐ waiver of signatures is requested - oral consent or assent
☐ waiver of signatures is requested - consent text will be presented in a letter, email, or online (explain below)
☐ waiver of consent is requested (provide justification below)
12. Describe how the consent procedures will be implemented - at which point in the recruitment process, by whom, and how the consent document(s) will be shared with participants. Also indicate how participants will communicate their consent (initially and ongoing) and what will occur if they decline.

After the potential participant has been screened, and an interview date, time, and place set up, the researcher will give the participant the informed consent letter. The consent letter will be either physically given to the participant, or it will be sent electronically via email. Before the interview, the researcher must have a copy of the signed consent letter received either in person or via email. The researcher will verbally communicate the participant's voluntary status and right to withdraw from the research, the right to decline to answer any questions, and the right to change their mind verbally before proceeding with the interview. The researcher will ask the participant if they understand the voluntary nature of their participation, their right to decline to answer any questions, and the right to change their mind before proceeding with the interview. This verbal exchange will be recorded. The interview will not proceed unless the participant acknowledges they understand their rights and the voluntary nature of their participation. The participant will have a signed copy of the informed consent letter to keep. This letter will include a phone number and email of the researcher. If the participant chooses to decline or changes their mind after the interview, they can communicate this to the researcher either verbally (in-person or on the phone) or via email.
### J. Application and Attachment Checklist

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Not Applicable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All questions are answered</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training is on file for PI and Advisor</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training is on file or pending for other key personnel</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>□</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All applicable items on the Informed Consent Checklist are included in consent document(s)</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>□</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**ATTACHMENTS INCLUDED**

- Recruitment materials - text is included for each item listed in Question E1. If the same text is being used for more than one method, the attachment(s) indicate that. | ✓   | □ |                |
- Consent materials - text is included for each item listed in Question I1. If the same text is being used for more than one method, the attachment(s) indicate that. | ✓   | □ |                |
- Screening tools or instruments are attached.                            | ✓   | □ |                |
- Data collection instruments and/or interview questions are attached.    | ✓   | □ |                |
- Debriefing script or text is attached, when deception or omission is involved, or when sharing resource info | □   | ✓ |                |
- Emergency action plan is attached, if physical activity is involved     | □   | ✓ |                |
- Letters/emails of cooperation are attached or will be forwarded          | ✓   | □ |                |