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The Construction of Female Athletes in
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BRINGING BODIES BACK IN: THE CONSTRUCTION OF FEMALE ATHLETES IN INTERCOLLEGIATE CROSS COUNTRY RUNNING

By

Elizabeth Paige Ransom

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ABSTRACT

BRINGING BODIES BACK IN:
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INTERCOLLEGIATE CROSS COUNTRY RUNNING

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This study examines women's subjective experience in competitive sport and demonstrates that runner's experiences, and in turn, their bodies, are shaped by the patterned networks within which they are embedded. Of eating disorder cases in the United States, 90 percent are women, with female athletes diagnosed at a higher rate than female non athletes. The purpose of this work is to discuss bodies as collective entities produced through the cooperation of networks made up of people and things. In contrast to this approach eating disorders have traditionally been discussed from a biological and psychological perspective. This study argues that only by looking at sport in the context of patterned networks, are we able to see how a high level of disordered eating and eating disorders among female athletes become the norm, not the exception. By placing the embodied female athlete at the center of analysis we can begin to understand the complex intersections of the body, sport and society.

To my parents and sister for all of your love and support.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

Section I. INTRODUCTION

"The horizons of an athlete's world can never stray far beyond her body. The course of an athletic career entails development of the ability to focus increasingly greater amounts of awareness on increasingly specific parts of the body. . . .The horizons of an intellectual's world lie at the edge of an ever-expanding cosmos of ideas that seems to recede further and further from the body. Athletes are very much in their bodies and, as a consequence, are usually very much within the systems that sustain those bodies. Intellectuals are forever trying to escape beyond bodies and the systems that sustain them . . . The chasm between the detachment from the body that characterizes much social science and the limited focus on the body that characterizes sports is difficult to bridge. Pierre Bourdieu states that the different worlds of the athlete and the social scientist have important implications for social theory; . . ." (Brownell 1995: 7-8).

Harry Edwards (1973: 361) was one of the first sociologists to critically analyze sport as an institution within our society. He writes, "from its racial problems to drug abuse, from its economic crisis to female segregation, what is 'wrong' with sport in America reflects America itself – particularly the relationships between contemporary social, political, and economic realities and this nation's value priorities, its attitudes and its perspectives." Bodies, like Edwards' assertion for sport, are vehicles for examining the values, attitudes and perspectives of a society. In sport the high levels of eating disorders and disordered eating among female athletes could be viewed as revealing a society where approximately 90% of those with diagnosed cases of eating disorders are women[1]. The issue of eating disorders is a prism through which sport reflects a nation's dominant ideas of the proper construction of bodies and how these constructions differ, particularly by

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[1]Clinically diagnosed eating disorders include bulimia, anorexia nervosa, and anorexia athletica. Disordered eating means individuals who have some of the characteristic traits of people with eating disorders, but do not have them all and therefore, would not fall under the clinical diagnosis.

gender, race and ethnicity.

The quotation from anthropologist Susan Brownell at the beginning of this paper eloquently reveals the chasm which exists between the ideological world of the academic and the practical world of the athlete. The implications for social theory due to mind/body dualism are apparent in a discussion of eating disorders among athletes. Theoretical approaches to the body have been dominated by psychological and biological discussions. Callon and Law (forthcoming: 8) write, "sometimes it is useful to talk of individual entities: to imagine that they are discrete objects in an environment. But it is equally appropriate to treat them as collective effects -- as patterned networks." Natural and social scientists alike, have taken the individual entities approach. They have discussed the athlete's body as a natural, biological fact, while ignoring the body as the context of social interaction. There are few discussions of bodies as "collective effects" constituted within patterned networks. Becker (1982) though writing of the art world, makes an argument that holds for a discussion of the networks involved in the construction of female athletic bodies. We begin to see that participants in sports, including athletes with eating disorders are not the products of individual endeavors, athletes who possess a rare and special gift. They are, rather, joint products of all the people who cooperate via a sport world's characteristic conventions to bring athletes into existence.

Feminist and sport sociologists have done little to examine women's subjective experience in competitive sport. This paper is an attempt to full this gap. The purpose of this study is to demonstrate that runner's bodies, and in turn, their experiences, are shaped

by the patterned networks within which they are embedded. Food, equipment, clothing and bodies are enlisted in this paper as representing extensions of human agency, but also as impacting and shaping the social environment. First I provide a brief overview of the medicalization literature on eating disorders, followed by an overview of the historical and sociological critique of sport as it applies to women's long distance running. This is followed by an overview of my methods and finally a discussion of the findings. The embodied female cross country runner forms the center around which the discussion below is built. From this point I attempt to build a comprehensive picture of the entire cooperating network that radiates out from the athlete in question (Becker 1982).

MEDICALIZATION OF DEVIANCE

In the cross country team environment, just as in the larger society, individuals diagnosed as having an eating disorder are viewed as slightly different or deviant from the rest of the team. In recent years this deviance has been medicalized. The medicalization process follows the bio-medical model used in our society. This model views the body as a series of separate, but interdependent parts (Doyal 1995). Doyal explains, "health is defined in individualistic ways -- it is always individuals who become sick, rather than social, economic, or environmental factors which cause them to do so."

With the increase in genetic research critical scientists and feminist scholars have criticized the shift to extreme individualism using the biomedical model (Doyal 1979; 1995; Hubbard 1995; Lewontin 1991). Geneticist R.C. Lewontin (1991) notes that an announcement appears almost weekly in the press proclaiming a possible genetic cause of some human illness. This approach to genetics has entered into the debate on eating disorders. A recent article in Science (1996) claims "researchers have found a brain chemical that appears to suppress appetite . . . which may help the hunt for obesity and eating-disorder treatment." At issue in locating eating disorders strictly within the individual is the diagnosis that women, since they are the vast majority of sufferers, are fundamentally different from and inferior to men (Bordo 1993).

Critics have identified both positive and negative aspects of the medicalization of deviance (Conrad and Schneider 1980). One negative aspect of the medicalization of eating disorders, of primary concern in this work, is the dislocation of the problem from society. One author argues that the deviant label leads to social isolation and public

apathy, "lessening the likelihood that audiences will respond to eating disorders as social problems worth 'doing something' about" (Way 1995: 91). Thus, medicalization depoliticizes the issue.

Another aspect of the medicalization process of eating disorders is the implicit assumption of a norm against which eating disorders are measured. Thus, a false dichotomy is constructed along the line of "normal" versus abnormal eating patterns. Much of the literature suggests this binary opposition (Hesse-Biber 1996). Instead, it can be argued disordered eating among women, though physically bad for the body, has been the norm for years and, therefore, cannot be considered deviant behavior. Bordo (1993), Root (1990) and Thompson (1992) suggest that, due to different life experiences, some women reach the stage of eating disorders, while others remain in the realm of disordered eating and many slip between the two. When viewing the interaction of women in sport, it is striking that women who have a non-conflicting interaction with food are atypical. The overall definition of what is "normal" becomes blurred.

Thus, the medicalization of eating disorders inhibits an analysis of the networks of people and things which cooperate and contribute in the construction of eating disorders and disorderly eating among female cross country runners. Eating disorders are an outcome of a web of complex social issues combined with individual biologies and psychologies. Let us briefly review the networks of sport which construct an environment prone to eating disorders and disordered eating.

IN THE CONTEXT OF SPORT

Each network relies on a set of conventions, which help people arrive at the terms on which they cooperate (Becker 1982). Thus conventions create and facilitate cooperating patterned networks. Becker (1982: 32) writes, "a system of conventions gets embodied in equipment, materials, training, available facilities and sites, systems of notation, and the like, all of which must be changed if any one component is." In sport, as elsewhere in society, gender forms a core division around which conventions are shaped and implemented. Goffman (1977) notes that physical surroundings can be enlisted to aid in the display or affirmation of gender. For example, observe the daily construction of gender in society through toilet segregation. Goffman (1977: 316) explains , "toilet segregation is presented as a natural consequence of the difference between the sex-classes [sic], when in fact it is rather a means of honoring, if not producing this difference." In sport the social construction of gender can be seen at all levels, from philosophy and policy, to the seemingly trivial level of rules, equipment, uniforms, and bodies (Cahn 1994).

Feminist sport literature recognizes that sports is an institution where biology continues to be used to justifiably segregate men and women (Refer to Birrell & Cole 1994; Burton Nelson 1994; Eitzen 1996; Messner 1988). Messner (1988: 198) argues that women's involvement in sport "represents a genuine quest by women for equality, control of their own bodies, and self-definition and as such it represents a challenge to the ideological basis of male domination." However, as male hegemony has increasingly been threatened, the socially constructed gender division in sport has not only been replicated,

but heightened. What could be considered minimal biological differences are naturalized and maximized through the construction of gender within the institution of sport.

The gender divide in sport constructs our notions of what is feminine and what is masculine. What is most important, however, is to realize that what is labeled feminine in the sporting world is defined as "less than" masculine sport. For example, playing with a larger ball in softball and a smaller one in basketball, lowering the net in volleyball and the hurdles in track, and specifying different rules, such as no stealing of bases, or smaller court dimensions.

By looking at the history of women's and men's long distance running, we are able to see how culturally constructed gender systems have been created and sustained and how they change overtime (Cahn 1994). The marathon was added to the modern Olympic games to commemorate the legendary Greek solider Pheidippides who collapsed and died after running from Marathon to Athens (total distance about 35 km) in 490 B.C. to announce the Greek victory over the Persians. Prior to 1908 the distance of the marathon was not standardized; it varied from 40 to 43 kilometers. In 1908 Dorondo Pietri collapsed at the end of the Olympic Marathon in London and as Downes and Mackay (1996: 13) describe, "did so much to capture the public's imagination that it effectively institutionalised the marathon's distance at the oddly chosen 26 miles 385 yards, which was used for that race from Windsor to London for no better reason than to give the Royal Family a better view of the finish line in the White City stadium."

Contrast this to the women running in the Olympics of 1928. Running was viewed

as excessively masculine, due to the lack of elaborate rules and equipment, with theoretically potentially harmful effects for women. If women participated there was the hypothesized potential of a woman actually becoming a man. The director of New York State's Physical Education, Dr. Frederick R. Rogers, represented the dominant view regarding female athletes. He argued that the requirements of sport were unnatural for female athletes. He claimed that track in particular would make women unfit for motherhood and would sacrifice their "health, physical beauty, and social attractiveness" (quoted in Cahn 1994: 114). Therefore, when several female runners fell to the ground in physical and emotional exhaustion at the end of an eight hundred-meter race in the 1928 Olympics, critics saw this as proof that women were unfit for strenuous competition. This culminated with the Olympic Congress banning all medium to long distance races for women and their consideration of banning women's events completely (Cahn 1994).

As of 1978, scientists were still arguing that due to women's physiology, they could not run marathons[2]. Prior to the 1980s, there were no women's distance races in the Olympics (Lovett 1997). Today, marathon running has reemerged as a sport in which women can compete. Likewise, female competition in cross country running has reemerged as a college sport.

Today, most women distance runners are seen as feminine, with most participants unaware of the controversy of women's participation in running in 1928. The fact that the

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[2]1972 was the first year women were recognized as officially being allowed to participate in the Boston Marathon, although the first woman ran unofficially in 1966 (Falls 1977).

sport is now viewed as feminine allows us to see that notions of femininity and masculinity are not 'natural' or timeless (Cahn 1994). But how did the sport of long distance running become a more feminine activity? To answer that, the focus needs to fall on the cooperative networks which construct the sport and the athletic bodies in the sport's environment.

METHODS: RUNNER AS WRITER

The research for this study took place over approximately one and a half years, from August 1995 to December of 1996. This incorporated two seasons of cross country running, which occur in the fall of each year. I conducted in-depth interviews with two collegiate women's cross country teams. I also was a participant-observer for two seasons with one of the teams. My participant observations began during my second year of working as a volunteer assistant with a women's cross country team at a large, Division I-A, Mid-Western school. In some aspects my participant observation was restricted due to my defined "official" position with the team. In other ways, due to the long duration of my participant observation and the vagueness of what purpose I was to fulfill for the team, I navigated through various positions -- as friend, coach, athlete, employee and silent observer -- and therefore at times gained detailed insight into various situations.

My observations took place predominantly during practice times and at meets. This was usually from 3:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. during the week and all day Friday and Saturday, depending on the meet location. Due to the physical aspect of participating with a sports team, written field notes were never taken on site. Field notes were written immediately following the practice or in the case of road trips, whenever the opportunity became available. If I was unable to record my field notes immediately following the event, I would write a brief description of observations, and elaborate upon them at a later point in time.

Due to the high level of interaction with the team, it was not possible to record every single event in the field. Moreover, because of my "official" status with the team,

there were some issues the women chose not to disclose in my presence, particularly discussions which involved the women breaking team rules, such as curfew or the no drinking alcohol policy. Limitations on my ability, as the researcher/outsider, to identify and interpret events which I see as significant is an aspect of qualitative field research which has been criticized (Gorelick 1991; Stacey 1988). In response to this criticism, I can only concede that my view and interpretation, although informed by academic literature, are indeed value-laden and partial.

As research investigator, participant and friend there are many ethical dilemmas which I encountered while doing this study. Merton reveals the intimacy of being a participant-observer. He writes (1972, 15), "only through continued socialization in the life of a group can one become fully aware of its symbolisms and socially shared realities . . . only so can one decipher the unwritten grammar of conduct and the nuances of cultural idiom." Using personal interaction and relationships as data leaves me, the researcher in an ethical dilemma of what is appropriate to use for "data." In an effort to deal with this ethical dilemma I have attempted to integrate my findings in a manner which will not expose any of the individuals in my study. Nevertheless, I have to acknowledge Stacey's (1988, 23) point, that the ethnographic method exposes subjects to far greater danger and exploitation than more positivist and abstract research methods.

I conducted two sets of interviews. The first group of interviews were done with members of the team for which I was the volunteer assistant coach at the end of the second season of my participation. I interviewed approximately fifteen of the twenty-one

women on the team. The second set of interviews were conducted with another women's cross country team at a medium size Southern, Division I-AA university. I conducted interviews with all the women on the team, which consisted of ten members. Of these ten, I am friends with four of the women, while the other women I did not know prior to the interviews. The in-depth interviews were designed to be a semi-structured, open-ended discussion. I asked similar questions of all the women, but allowed each woman to elaborate on the areas she felt were important. All of my in-depth interviews were tape recorded and later transcribed.

I chose to do two sets of interviews with two teams because of a few differences in the team compositions which I see as significant to the topic of disorderly eating among women in sport. First, one team has a male coach and one team has a female coach. The issue of men coaching women versus women coaching women is a contested topic within the sports world (Acousta and Carpenter 1994; Blinde 1994). Second, the possibility for regional differences in the way women perceive themselves and how others perceive women involved in the sport, although this ended up appearing insignificant. Finally, the two teams differed in skill level composition, with the larger team having more members that run faster times than the other team with ten members. Some of the literature on eating disorders and sport suggests that the more competitive levels of competition contribute to hyper-body awareness (Sundgot 1994).

The women involved in this study were predominantly white, middle class, heterosexuals. The homogenous composition of the group in terms of class and sexuality

is reflective of the collegiate sporting population, which Birrell (1994) notes, is not very diverse, nor supportive of diversity. Also, the specific sport of cross country provides for little racial and ethnic diversity. With the exception of some Southwestern and West coast schools, and a few international runners, the participants are predominantly white from European descent. However, it should be noted that while most these athletes were homogenous in race, class and sexuality, the viewpoints and perspectives of these women varied widely.

When the theme of this study began to emerge from my field observations, it was my intent to incorporate other racial and ethnic groups, but in order to do this I would have had to expand my study to include track and field. Due to time and money constraints, this became an impossibility. This lack of diversity is a major weakness in this study and something which needs concentrated attention in future studies.

Finally, I bring to my research a large quantity of experiential knowledge, which guided my research, and therefore it is necessary to situate myself as both researcher and participant. I have been involved in sports throughout my life, although I did not start running until my senior year of high school. I received a four year, track and cross country scholarship to a Division I-AA university. Competitively, I was mediocre my first year of college. Through the next three years, I grew to be one of the best on the women's team. This development of a person's running ability, includes increased attention to the physical body of the athlete, which in this case, is my body awareness. Only after I graduated from college did I began to think critically of my college athletic

experience. From readings (see Blinde 1994 for example) and discussion I was surprised to learn that collegiate athletic women have many similar experiences in their sporting worlds. This has provided a basis for studying why women incur similar experiences within the sporting world, particularly those experiences that are traditionally labeled by society as internal, psychological issues that can only be constructed and dealt with by the individual herself, such as issues of body weight.

I worked with a grounded theory approach. Therefore when I began my research, while I had ideas of possible topics, I had no specific agenda or theoretical perspective for my research. The issue of women runners' bodies and their weight kept coming to the fore in my research, particularly my participant observations. Initially I rejected the idea of pursuing issues of weight and eating disorders within my research, if for no other reason, than I felt it was too much in the area of psychology. Underlying this was the feeling that the topic was trivial compared to the many other potential topics related to women in sport. What became painstakingly obvious is the fact that issues of weight, but more specifically the female body, are far from trivial. Instead, as my research and review of the literature progressed, I discovered women's bodies are perhaps the strongest thread that weaves through the lives of all these women.

Disordered Eating and Eating Disorders

A brief note needs to be made regarding the label 'eating disorder.' Most women in this study would not be clinically diagnosed as having an eating disorder. However, following a labeling-interactionist approach, who is labeled as having an eating disorder is a political matter which is decided by those who have the power to legitimate their definition. Therefore, the label does not have clear boundaries (Becker 1982; Conrad and Schneider 1980; Goffman 1963). There is wide variation in behavior among the women in this study. The term disordered eating is used to reflect the varied and strained relationship these cross country women (and most women in society) have with food.

I am conducting this discussion with the idea that it relates to women in the sporting world, although this is assuming uniformity among all women in sport, which is surely not the case. I suspect that some of my findings will not be applicable to all women in the sports environment, just as these findings may be extended to some women outside the intercollegiate sports environment. It is a fallacy to place all women under the same label, "eating disorders and disordered eating." This suggests one cause rather than recognizing various factors contributing to what appears, initially to be the same effect.

Section II. COOPERATING NETWORKS

CONSTRUCTING FOOD AND BODIES

One location in the network is food and the conventions which sustain it. Intercollegiate athletes spend large quantities of time around one another, with most, though not all, establishing the team as their dominant social group in college. The structure of the sporting world, particularly intercollegiate sports creates an environment where the team becomes one of the primary foci within the individual athlete's world. Interaction among team members forms a crucial aspect of the network within which the female athlete is embedded. It is often this aspect which is overlooked by sociologists.

Food, because it serves more than just utilitarian purposes, i.e. nourishment, is an integral part of this interaction process. In fact, there are a multiplicity of purposes food fulfills in society and in the sports environment. One example is the standard of serving the "best" food for special occasions. Cline (1990: 47) explains, "food is part of the nurturing process throughout the world, but in different places it takes on special meanings. Each culture marks it own society with special foods and food rituals." There are particular foods that are believed to be performance enhancing for long distance running, such as those comprising a high carbohydrate, low-fat diet. Thus, there is the ritualistic event of eating a spaghetti dinner the night prior to a race.

The sport also contributes to constructing long distance runners' daily eating. For example here is an exchange I witnessed between two women one afternoon after a tough workout. Megan announced, "I had the perfect lunch today. I had some rice and then an apple. It is just perfect with a little salt and pepper on the rice and then an apple is just

right. I had a big breakfast this morning though. I pigged out! I had three bowls of cereal." After the other woman commented, Megan continued, "I only eat 500 calories before practice everyday."

The other woman questioned how Megan could eat three bowls of cereal and still only have eaten 500 calories. Megan responded that with Rice Chex cereal you can eat under 500 calories. The other woman questioned the serving portion, however, at which point Megan announced, "exactly a cup per serving. I measure!"

What is important to note about Megan's lunch of rice and an apple, is that in the sport of running, particularly on the day of a hard workout or a race, eating something light that will not stay in your stomach is desirable, due to the ill consequences that affect the athlete if she does not eat light and then has a strenuous workout. However, Megan, as with most women on the team, had not just eaten a light lunch because she did not want to feel sick during the workout. She constructs and determines the food she eats each day based on the number of calories as well as the number of fat grams, regardless of what she will be doing that particular day within running. She also viewed her diet as an accomplishment, as she proudly announced to her teammate how and of what she constructed it. In addition, Megan commented that her roommates, who are also on the team, get mad at her for measuring her cereal. Thus, food consumption may seen as extension of competition within the team.

As this example illustrates, food rituals for performance enhancement also intersect with other conventions, such as the gendering of certain foods. In Western societies there

are a number of assumptions concerning the types of food men and women prefer. Foods labeled as feminine include chocolates, pastries, cakes, white meat, fish, noodles, pasta, salads and vegetables (Lupton 1996). Note that all these foods are viewed as delicate and/or sweet and light -- the same metaphorical description used to describe traditional white, middle class femininity in Western society. Hence, while a high carbohydrate dinner the night before a race is standard for long distance runners, there will generally be a differentiation between genders in the type of high carbohydrate dinner consumed, with the females more likely to order something containing no meat, little or no fat, and in a smaller quantity.

Gendering of foods arises from society's extension of the gendered construction of bodies. Thus, bodies impact the way we view food and reciprocally food impacts the way we construct bodies. The gendered construction of women's food and bodies in college athletics also comes from others within the sports network. Gender checking in the Olympics [3] is noted as a process which assumes that all men are similar in size, strength and skill, and therefore all men are better than all women in sports (Lorber 1993). A similar assumption is made regarding women's consumption of food. A coach at one of the institutions where I conducted interviews asked, "why do women get the same amount of meal money as the men do?" The built in assumption of this statement is that all

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[3]Gender checking is done by scraping cells from the interior wall of the woman's cheek to insure that all women competing in women's Olympic sports are truly women. Gender checking is done to prevent men from passing as women and competing in women's sports.

women eat less than all men, and therefore should be given less money with which to eat. This ignores the vast variety of eating patterns among people and among sports, with almost every sport instituting a particular diet to "enhance" an athlete's performance. Here again, how female athletes' bodies and the food they consume are constructed reveals the multiple intersections of networks within society.

Linked with food rituals and the gendering of foods, is the concept that food maintains social order in society. In Western societies, meals are eaten three times a day, with particular foods consumed at each meal in a certain quantity and even in a certain order. Meals structure our days more than the clock (Cline 1990). Likewise, meals provide a central organizing characteristic on sports teams.

Almost every weekend of a female cross country runner's life is spent on road trips with the team. On road trips (but not confined to them) everyone eats together at a specific time to allow for the proper diet and digestion of food before running. For example, on the morning of a meet the team gathers together at a designated time and location to eat breakfast. In addition, when traveling with a large group, often the most accessible food is fast food, and for women who are weight conscious, the ability to eat, but eat low-fat, proves to be a struggle.

Therefore, it should be no surprise that weight and food are regular topics of discussion. As noted above, the verbal ways the women construct food, and in turn their bodies, are endless and include discussions such as how many grams of fat are in particular foods. The discussions pop-up anywhere and usually engage just a few of the women, as

the above stated comments between Megan and another woman illustrate. However, occasionally entire team discussions arise, such as one occasion when the women were riding in a van together. As they were returning from the weekend's competition the entire van, with a few of the women leading the discussion began to discuss the appropriate foods to eat. The best foods were defined as those that are low in fat. The discussion, lasted for hours. On other occasions team members challenge each other in bets or competitions to see who could lose a designated number of pounds first or who could avoid eating particular types of food, such as chocolate.

The women also engage in what I call non-verbal constructions of food. Non-verbal cues include the interaction of the women sitting together at meals. All observe what others are eating and there is an awareness of the woman who chooses to pick everything (cheese, meat, etc.) off of her salad, and then eat only the lettuce. Less extreme than this is simply the awareness of what others are eating. Essentially, there is a constant watch over what others are eating, with team members often commenting, "you are going to eat that?" Sometimes, other team members view what others are eating as permission to eat the unhealthy item also. Thus, when another team member chooses to eat something considered unhealthy (i.e., fattening) she will talk others into splitting it with her or getting one too. Again, this point reiterates that the act of eating serves multiple functions. Eating can be viewed as both bonding time for team members and an extension of competition within the team.

Food is part of our social structure and the power relations of the social structure. Feminists have focused on this dynamic of power, since women have historically been the ones to prepare foods for their families (Orbach 1986). Cline (1990: 85) writes, "it is on the backs of women making cheese and tomato sandwiches . . . or huge roast beef and Yorkshire dinners, when they could be doing something else in their own interests, that patriarchy is built and maintained, step by step, dish by dish."

Eating disorders are a prime example of the construction of food in the power structure of society. Women have been taught to express love and nurturing for others through food preparation, yet women themselves are supposed to watch there own weight, maintain an ideal figure and not partake of the food they prepare (Orbach 1986). Within the power structure, food also represents wealth. In order for eating disorders to even become a problem within a society, there must be enough accumulated wealth for restriction of food intake to become a choice, not a way of life. Hence, eating disorders are predominantly a phenomenon of Western, industrialized societies.

Finally, what must be realized is that this construction of women's food and their bodies creates a subculture within the team, to the point that these endless discussions and comparisons of food seem "normal." Team members are unaware or unable to see how others new to their environment or how outsiders might view this emphasis on food and bodies as excessive. Eva, a new person on the team exclaimed, "I never dealt with people who were so worried about their weight until we got here . . . . I've never seen so many people that were so fat conscious in my life." In turn, team members are unable to see the

impact this subculture has on themselves, much like the proverbial fish that does not realize it's environment is made up of water. For example, Mary spoke of her increasing awareness of fat grams in college, but when asked how she became aware of fat content in food, she responded as if it were just commonsense: "Well, well just pictures. I mean like seeing pictures . . . my freshmen year in college. I mean I was a little chunk." Mary's observation of herself expresses an increased level of attention and awareness of her body and the food she consumes. The increased attention to her body can in part be attributed to the ways the sport is constructed for women.

FEMININITY BY WAY OF THE BODY

From the 1970s on, women were sent the contradictory messages of "run for beauty" and run for "self-liberation." Like society, sport has provided opportunities for the advancement of women, but it has been fraught with re-assertions of sexism. Women and society are involved in this re-framing of sustaining and countering views of women in sport. Cooper writes, "marathon running became an opportunity for women to explore their own physical limits of endurance and speed" (1995: 70). Yet, Cooper also notes that there were differing reasons given for why men and women should take up running. Men who took up running were supposedly perceived as "contemplative, taciturn, vagabond philosophers," while women's running emphasized the health and cosmetic benefits (Cooper 1995: 69).

During the increasing popularity of running in the mid-1970s, runners became important to the corporate world as consumers. Cooper states that running was the most popular sport among upwardly mobile urbanites. Increasingly women runners in the 1970s fit the image of the desirable consumer, particularly when female runners who were homemakers were "ascribed their husbands' status" (Cooper 1995: 67). So with the rise in popularity of long distance running among women, corporate America saw the opportunity to turn a profit by packaging a feminine image in what had traditionally been considered a masculine sport.

Thus, the commodification of the female runner began to emerge as one convention within the sport of women's long distance running. It should be noted that the audience to which the appeal of the popularity of long distance running was directed was

predominantly white, upwardly mobile, middle class constituency. Thus, the constructions of the ideal feminine beauty which extended from this movement were based on a long history of Western ideals of white femininity. Among other attributes this feminine ideal includes a pale, frail, thin body, an ideal inherently contradictory to athletic endeavors (Seid 1994; Wooley 1994). Almost all the women interviewed made reference to the idea that skinny is beautiful. One woman, Bridget, recognized this normalizing message women receive in society. Speaking of a high school teammate who was recovering from an eating disorder Bridget said, "I think she needed that extra vote of confidence so she had a reason to get back to where she needed to be, like she had somewhere to go. Some girls that don't have that extra outlet, *they want to be thin, they want to be beautiful* and they have no one telling them to be anything but" [emphasis added].

Other women recognized this "thin is beautiful" message that our society constructs for women, but they recognized it within the context of this being the ideal they were also striving towards. In this respect, women participating in cross country running, like most athletes, are participating for multiple reasons or with a variety of goals which arise from intersecting networks. One reason for participation is athletic achievement, but also with the extra incentive of obtaining the "perfect" body. For example, Lois states, "I think a lot of it has to do with the fact that now all the models are slim perfect figured people . . . so if you see that and you say, 'wow, she looks like that, I want to look like that too.' And for me I mean I do that, you know, you see some beautiful girl in a beautiful dress in a magazine, you go wow that's really pretty." Lois continues on to

explain how college long distance running is part of her way of obtaining this ideal. She states, "running is my way of, I mean, I like this more than anything because it forces me to stay in shape. And that's my goal -- to stay in shape. . . . I'm not going to be fat, that's all I can say. I'll never have a gut. No, I'll run, no I'll run like a lot to keep in shape."

Another woman, Nancy reveals how she feels involvement in sport should help her obtain this ideal beauty, but she sees herself falling short of the beauty standard. She states of her other team members:

> I think if they were to have my body they would maybe think like I do a little more, because I told them I'm dieting right now, and they try to talk me out of it. But now I have just come to realize I shouldn't have to diet. I'm just not going to diet anymore, and even though I care what my body looks like to be beautiful and everything, but as long as I am running good I really don't. It is just my thighs and my butt, I know every girl says that, but I just want them to be tiny. I don't know I just want to have no thighs and no butt and some people do . . . ten pounds probably everyone wants to lose.

Note that Nancy emphasizes the difference between her body, her teammates' bodies and women in general.

While the form of the beauty/athlete contradiction has changed over the years, sport today is still considered to be the one domain where success infers a certain degree of innate masculinity. Several statements made by the women in the interviews reflect the dominant ideology which views the sporting world as the symbol of the "natural" order of things, an order in which men, and what have been labeled male body parts (e.g. hormones, muscles, etc.) are considered better. One woman wondered if female athletes have more masculine hormones than women who are not as athletically talented. She

stated, "I mean because I do notice a lot of girls who are very masculine looking are the good ones." Another woman, Kathleen said, "I just think a lot of men are just naturally built with that [athletic] body and they're not going to, you know, women gain weight."

Lorber (1993) illuminates the way conventions of sport train women to meet different goals than men within the sports network. Men's bodies are constructed to be powerful, while women's bodies are constructed to be sexual in the sporting world. Her main argument is that "bodies differ in many ways physiologically, but they are completely transformed by social practices to fit into the salient categories of a society, the most pervasive of which are 'female and male'" (Lorber 1993: 569).

Messner (1996: 225) proposes that, "sport offers a normalizing equation for men: athleticism = masculinity = heterosexuality. For women athletes, the equation has nearly always been more paradoxical: athleticism? femininity? heterosexuality?" What is missing, but yet implicit in this equation is the athlete's body. Sport offers a normalizing equation for male athletic bodies. Athletic men are thought to have a physically fit body, which in its most generalized notion means a muscular, large build. In contrast, for women a physically fit body is much more paradoxical, in that she should be toned, but not too muscular, nor of too large a build.

Both Lorber and Messner (1997) argue that society takes bodies and inserts them into fixed categories, but they fail to discuss how these categories impose and transform bodies. As Lewontin puts it (1991: 63), "organisms do not find the world in which they develop. They make it. Reciprocally, the internal forces are not autonomous, but act in

response to the external." In response to the question, if there has ever been a conflict between being a female and being an athlete, Lois mentions the feminine ideal of running as constructed on the body. She states, "I think runners are feminine. I don't think basketball or softball is feminine . . . I definitely think running is a very feminine sport. I mean look at all the girls on the team . . . they all wear pretty hairdos and this and that, you know." In this response she mentions hairdos as a measure of femininity. In other parts of the interview Lois alludes to an emphasis on the actual body size and shape of the female athlete. If it were just hairdos that distinguished her ideals of femininity then women in basketball and softball could not be excluded from her ideal.

Another point to be taken into account when discussing the conventions of cross country running is the actual physiological demands for an athlete to be successful in sports competition. This point is often overlooked by social scientists. This is not arguing for a return to biological reductionism (Turner 1992). Rather, this is reasserting that not just *any* body will do in the sporting world. There are specific bodies required of athletes, primarily a physically fit body for competition. This requirement, however, leaves room for a wide range of variation in bodily appearance. Turner, however, notes the need to bring bodies into a discussion of social control, specifically when discussing women's bodies in a patriarchal society (cited in Theberge 1991). Society imposes a more narrowly defined image of a physically fit body -- particularly for women.

One bodily requirement of female athletes, particularly in the sports of running, gymnastics and swimming, is low percentage body-fat. In turn, low body-fat is associated

with thinness. However, this is socially constructed, because low body-fat does not always equate with thinness. Body builders are the best example of this. The goal of body builders is to have a very low percentage body-fat, yet have a large build. Therefore, in women's cross country running, thin is viewed as performance enhancing, but thin is also associated with traditional white feminine beauty.

Eva's response represents the overarching view that some runners directly mentioned, while others only mentioned indirectly. Eva sees being an athlete and being feminine as never having been an issue because "they think of cross-country girls as *little skinny girls*, that run miles and miles, it's that stereotype, it's not like oh, those *masculine big girls*" [my emphasis added]. This example illustrates that every aspect of the athlete's appearance, including body size, runs the risk of gender assessment (Curry 1996).

CREATING UNIFORMITY

One can therefore suspect that the role of normal and the role of stigmatized are parts of the same complex, cuts from the same standard cloth (Goffman 1963: 130).

Cahn remarks that in the 1950s individual female athletes created personal strategies for combating the incompatible image of being female and being an athlete. Some women "demonstrated femininity through the clothes they wore, their demeanor, or off-field interest" (Cahn 1994: 5). Today, a way to express femininity in the sport of long distance running is through the body, the uniforms on the body and the length of distance run. All three are smaller versions of the bigger 'male' counterpart. The length of distance run in men's races is 5 miles and 6.2 miles, while the women's race is 3.1 and 3.72 miles.

The uniforms worn by most intercollegiate women's cross country teams in Division I and II competition have a look and fit similar to a woman's bathing suit (see Figures 1-3), with slight variation among uniforms in amount of body exposed or tightness. The uniforms are the last convention of the sports network that will be discussed. However, they are one convention that is highly significant, yet rarely discussed by other scholars.

Today, the distance of the cross country race stays the same, but the uniforms and the bodies in those uniforms continue to shrink, paradoxically during the era of increasing 'gender equity.'[4] It should be noted that, aside from a change in the type of fabric used,

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[4] "Psychologists and social researchers contend there has been a 30-year trend toward a feminine ideal of ever-increasing slenderness" (Way 1995: 92).

the men's uniform for cross country running has changed very little over the past 25 years. The women's uniform however, has been drastically modified (see Figures 1-5).

Many women commented that the briefs were a source of status and teams that wear the briefs are viewed as the better teams. This was true in the 1950's as well. Cahn (1994: 103) writing of female basketball players in the 1950s notes that, "uniforms were either an unquestioned part of the game or, more positively, a badge that symbolized team membership and advanced skill." In other words, performance is associated with and tied to the uniform although there is no intrinsic link. Not surprisingly, given that the uniform is a symbol of status, very few of the women were critical of them. While they provide no direct improvement of performance, the uniforms are another convention of sport that goes unquestioned. However, cross country uniforms (see Figures 1-3) presuppose a certain body type *and* our society imposes notions of what this body should be.

It appears that women shape their bodies to fit the uniforms. Most of the women interviewed, like much of society, viewed eating disorders as strictly an individual, psychological issue (the body as private domain), yet at the same time the sport and the required uniform is one which makes the women highly aware of their bodies (the body becomes public domain). Almost all of the women interviewed said they initially did not like the uniforms, but most have grown to like them. While it could be argued the women just got used to them, I am arguing that these women are shaping their bodies, mostly by losing weight, to make for a better fit in the uniforms. They feel more comfortable in the uniform and in their bodies as they lose weight. Hence, Nancy's comment, "I lost weight

but it was like a gross skinny, but...um...I liked it. I mean I just liked it. I just felt so comfortable being skinny."

For a few of the women body size was not an issue for them personally and therefore, they never felt adverse to the uniform. Eva, for example, reveals how the uniform is a status symbol, but also how the uniform presupposes a certain body. Eva declares:

> I love the butt-huggers. I convinced my high school team to get them because I saw the college kids wearing them, people in my state were wearing them, the good teams, like high status teams that were traditionally good had them. . . . I mean, we had a *real skinny cross country team, so nobody complained.* People complained more in track, but not very many, but after one year doing it, it was just accepted . . . . Some people got continually used to them, because it's such a power/status thing . . . . Now on this team I know a lot of people don't like them, a lot of people feel self-conscious. I mean, *if I was in their body I might feel self-conscious too*, I don't know [emphasis added].

Another runner, Kathleen, articulated very clearly how the body is on public display, particularly in the patriarchal environment of sport. She spoke of a discussion she had with one of the coaches about new uniforms. She explained that the coach was going to order new uniforms that consisted of crop tops with briefs (see Figure 3). She asked how the coach could have ordered them before getting the size of each athlete. Kathleen states, "he responded, 'the men don't complain.' I'm like 'yeah, you all don't complain because you get to see girls' butts.' It's fine if you're a bean pole and you don't have any fat on your legs."

Note, however, that the women rarely identified the connection between their weight loss and their increasing satisfaction with the uniforms. Referring to her initial dislike of the uniforms, Veronica states, "I vowed I was not going to go to a school that wore bun huggers. . . . I definitely would stand at the [starting] line and, you know, try to cover my butt and my legs but, I mean, I was less competitive then, too . . . but I don't think I was self-conscious because the uniforms were risqué. I think it was just more my own thoughts about it."

The key point is, Veronica does not feel the uniforms have anything to do with the way she felt; it was just 'all in her mind.' However, many of her comments allude to how she has reshaped her body to fit the uniform. Consider a discussion she had with her coach, which she conveyed in our interview: "The coach never said anything about my weight, like my sophomore and junior year the coach said, 'you're really looking fit now. You used to have a little on your hips and butt -- you know, I wouldn't have said anything -- but now you look good.'" This exchange with the coach, as well as Kathleen's exchange, highlights one more way the body is made a social concern.

NATIONAL COLLEGIATE ATHLETIC ASSOCIATION'S "TREATMENT" OF THE ISSUE

Finally, having mentioned the coach one last point in the network needs to be mentioned. The National Collegiate Athletic Association is the dominant governing body of most intercollegiate sports is the US. The NCAA creates the policy and rules of intercollegiate sport and regulates the coaching and the athletes. The NCAA is a silent structure present in these women's daily lives, regulating their practice time, their study hours, the money allocation, and their uniforms. Therefore, the implications of the NCAA's treatment of eating disorders both helps and hurts these women. The NCAA has taken a reactive position in dealing with the issue of eating disorders, and they have adopted the biomedical model for diagnosis and treatment. Consider two ads produced by the NCAA attempting to address two problems in the sporting world.

Advertisement "A" (see Figure 6) encourages men to avoid using steroids and shows a male lifting weights, with the caption "Make muscle the old-fashioned way". The caption indicates the male is clearly in control of the situation and has the ability to control the situation. He is holding a weight (which we assume by the flex of his arm is heavy) and he can at any moment decide to put down the weight, once again inferring he has control over the situation.

Contrast this ad to advertisement "B" (Figure 7). This ad shows a woman sitting slumped on a scale with her right leg chained to it. The caption reads, "Don't Let Weight Control You" and then gives two lists of warning signs for Anorexia Nervosa and Bulimia. The caption infers a lack of control on the part of the woman. If the words are not

enough to emphasize her helplessness, she is *chained* to the scale and her posture tells us she is mentally and physically exhausted or fed-up with trying to unchain herself -- meaning she cannot do it alone. Also, note the list of warning signs provided. This list has been provided for not only the individual sufferer, but more importantly for those around her to be able to judge and decide if this person has a problem. Again this infers that women in sport are viewed as being inferior mentally, weaker and lacking control.

Finally, and most importantly, the woman in the ad is dressed in a pair of shorts and a T-shirt, not the standard uniform of female athletes in cross country, gymnastics, or swimming. These three sports, "appear to be the most affected by this phenomenon of eating disorders" (Blind 1994: 141). One final point: both of these ads present the problem as strictly located within the individual, rather than addressing how intercollegiate sport produces an environment where steroid abuse and eating disorders are a part of the patterned networks that construct the environment of the athlete.

CONCLUSIONS

If, then, the stigmatized person is to be called a deviant, [she] might better be called a normal deviant, at least to the extent that [her] situation is analyzed with the framework presented here (Goffman 1963: 131).

Thus, if we place the embodied female athlete at the center of analysis of patterned networks we can begin to understand the complex intersections of the body, sport and society. We can then begin to understand why some male cross country runners will have disordered eating and eating disorders (thin for performance), but why more female runners have disordered eating and eating disorders (thin for performance and feminine identity).

This description of the various intersecting networks of food, sport and bodies could be expanded to include many more intersections with other networks. However, due to time and space this discussion has attempted to focus solely on the networks that are located closest to the embodied female athletes. Because each point or actor (i.e., food, sport, and bodies) represents an intersection of networks, the order in which each is discussed is irrelevant. The main point is that all of these networks contribute to the construction of female cross country runners' lives and in turn, contribute to the construction of their bodies. These patterned networks form a foundation for future analysis of the lives of intercollegiate female athletes.

The intent has been to show that bodies are collective entities produced through the cooperation of networks made up of people and things. Uniforms partially shape women's bodies and produce part of this collectivity as non-uniform bodies have to fit into

them. The particular type of uniform tends to promote eating disorders and disorderly eating by emphasizing unduly the differences between actual and ideal body type.

Discussing eating disorders and disorderly eating within this framework provides for a better understanding than a strictly biological or psychological explanation. To work to change the conventions of sport is an extremely difficult task, because conventions are "complexly interdependent systems, so that one small change may require a variety of other changes" (Becker 1982: 35). Thus, as the quote from Goffman at the beginning of this section reflects, we can begin to see that, in the context of the sporting world constructed around false gender distinctions, a high level of disordered eating and eating disorders becomes the norm, not the exception.

APPENDIX

Figure 1: The tank top with briefs. Uniform first worn in the late 1980s.

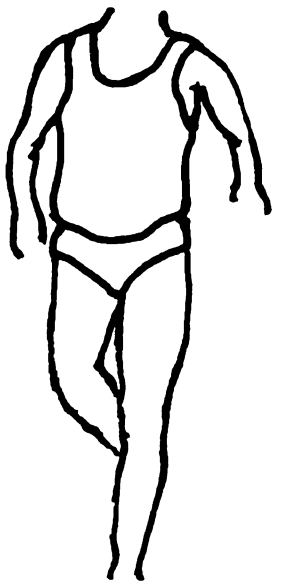

Figure 2: Teams began to wear the one-piece body suit in the early 1990s.

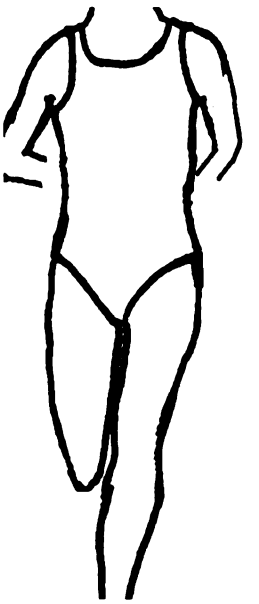

Figure 3: The most recent innovation in women's uniform, the crop top with briefs.

Figure 4: Example of a male uniform in 1996. Men's uniforms have changed very little over the past fifty years.

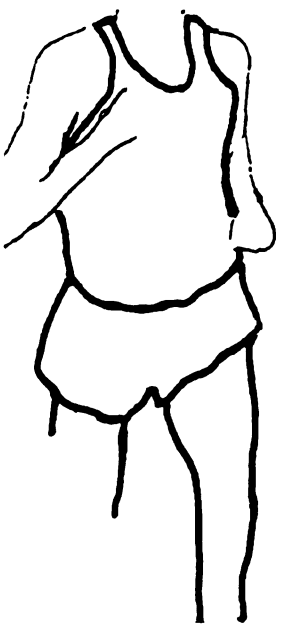

Figure 5 - Advertisement Discouraging Steroid Use (*NCAA News* 1996)

Figure 6 - Advertisement Discouraging Eating Disorders (*NCAA News* 1996)

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