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FEMINIST CONSIDERATIONS FOR JUSTICE IN SPORT:
A CONCEPTUAL AND PHILOSOPHICAL ANALYSIS OF REFORM

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Colleen English

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The dissertation of Colleen English was reviewed and approved* by the following:

R. Scott Kretchmar
Professor of Exercise and Sport Science
Dissertation Advisor
Chair of Committee

Mark S. Dyreson
Professor of Kinesiology

Jaime Schultz
Assistant Professor of Kinesiology

Linda Caldwell
Professor of Recreation, Park, and Tourism Management

Stephen J. Piazza
Professor of Kinesiology
Graduate Program Director, Department of Kinesiology

*Signatures are on file in the Graduate School
ABSTRACT

Today’s college sportsworld faces numerous charges of corruption ranging from educational dishonesty to blatant cheating. In this dissertation, I argue that the cause of these problems originates with hegemonic masculinity and the over-emphasis on winning present in intercollegiate athletics. This has been harmful for both women and men. Female and male athletes have been marginalized and alienated because they did not meet the standards enforced by an athletic realm that celebrates achievements associated with a specific form of masculinity.

To tackle these issues, in this dissertation, I analyze the potential for sport reform through a feminist lens, one that recognizes the importance combating hypercompetitive attitudes and antecedent hegemonic masculinity. To do this, I look at philosophic and conceptual possibilities for reform. I argue that reformation can become a reality if we think about competition differently and modify behavior accordingly.

Chapter 1 puts forth a definition of hegemonic masculinity and its place in sport. Chapter 2 historically contextualizes women’s sport reform, providing a brief overview of women’s physical education and intercollegiate athletics, with particular emphasis on efforts toward change. In Chapter 3, I review the literature highlighting potential sites for reform already identified by a number of sport philosophers. Chapter 4 justifies the need for reform in intercollegiate sport, drawing from research focused on the problems with college athletics and feminist ideals of sport. In Chapter 5, I develop and describe gender-neutral reforms for sport, that is, changes that should improve the sporting experience regardless of gender.
This dissertation proposes a conceptual and philosophic analysis of sport reform that is meant to challenge the current hegemonic model of sport, which thrives on exclusive forms of masculinity, and helps to create an interpretation of competition that is better for women and men.
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Introduction

In November 2013, San Francisco radio personality Damon Bruce, in what *Deadspin* called a “moronic, misogynistic rant,” weighed in on the controversial locker room bullying of Johnathan Marks by fellow Miami Dolphin Richie Incognito (Ley, 2013). Unsurprisingly, Bruce sided with Incognito, even going as far as to say, “guys like Johnathan Martin, they’re the ones actually distracting the locker room” (quoted in Ley, 2013). For Bruce, problems like this don’t exist because Incognito and others like him are bullies. They exist because sports, on their view, have become feminized and that “A lot of sports has lost its way and part of the reason is that women have been giving the directions” (quoted in Ley, 2013). Essentially, Bruce blames the inclusion of women and their opinions for ruining sport.

Bruce goes on to say that “Sports are set to the dial of men. Doesn’t mean men only. But that’s the setting. And I’m not going to allow it to be changed…I’m setting the temperature. The temperature’s set for men” (quoted in Ley, 2013). So, while Bruce aims his rant explicitly at the controversy between Martin and Incognito, he intends to make a larger point: sports are about men and masculinity. Although *Deadspin*’s characterization of Bruce’s rant as both “moronic” and “misogynistic” is accurate, his larger point is, in some ways, correct. Sport is an arena made by men for men. It emphasizes a particular type of masculinity and reinforces the stereotypes that go along with it. However, I disagree with Bruce’s recommendation that sports are a “guy’s world” that should be
retained. Instead, this over-emphasis on a specific type of masculinity lies at the heart of many of sport’s problems. Setting sport to “the dial of men” promotes an exclusive form of masculinity that not only alienates and marginalizes women, but many men as well.

Historically, a type of hegemonic masculinity dominated most Western sport. R.W. Connell defines hegemonic masculinity as a concept that seeks “the maintenance of practices that institutionalize men’s dominance over women” (Connell, 1987, p. 185). In other words, hegemonic masculinity allows for those who conform to a certain type of masculinity to ascend to positions of power, in particular over women as well as those men who do not or cannot meet the standards of hegemonic masculinity. This pattern of hegemonic masculinity can be seen throughout culture—from government to education.

Sport also provides a venue for expressing and reinforcing this view of reality.

I argue that many of sport’s problems stem from the influences of hegemonic masculinity. Many of the characteristics associated with it—such as an over-emphasis on competition that results in win-at-all-costs attitudes, poor relationships with competitors and teammates, and the loss of other values associated with athletics (such as aesthetics and excellence)—serve to limit and otherwise diminish the sporting experience. To remedy these specific problems, I contend that well-targeted reforms are necessary.

The hegemonic masculinity prevalent in sport suggests that gender is a specific issue in contemporary sport. Therefore, feminist reforms can be aimed at lessening the impact of this exclusive masculinity. I argue that these reforms should center on eliminating, or at least mitigating, hypercompetitive attitudes. Doing so, on my belief, will help to create better sport for both women and men.
Before outlining the chapter structure of my dissertation, it must be mentioned that my analysis of sport reform is limited to intercollegiate athletics. College athletes operate at a relatively elite level and embody a number of corrupt practices (as will be outlined in Chapter 3). It also occupies a unique position in the realm of sport. College athletes are not only some of the most talented players in their sport, but also students who must become competent scholars. Despite criticisms that college sports have become breeding grounds for professional athletes rather than activities that build athletic ability, knowledge, and character, the fact remains that college athletics claim to be a place where student-athletes further their education while improving their sport skills. If college sport is to live up to its stated objectives related to higher education, reform is much needed and long overdue.

While reform in college sport may impact youth, interscholastic, and professional sport, my recommendations will be specifically aimed at intercollegiate athletics. Even so, college sport has the ability to influence both professional sport and youth and interscholastic athletics. Young people and youth coaches can look to college sport for guidance on attitudes and behaviors toward competition, values, and interpersonal relationships in sport. Furthermore, the attitudes developed by college athletes may well continue as they become professional, elite level athletes.

I will carry out my analysis of hegemonic masculinity and prescriptions for potential reforms over the course of five chapters. Chapter 1 will cover conceptual descriptions of hegemonic masculinity, clarifying Connell’s definition, along with the works of other scholars that employ this model. Additionally, the chapter will detail the
role of hegemonic masculinity in sport, drawing on the work of sport scholars, such as Michael Messner and Varda Burstyn.

Chapter 2 provides historical context for hegemonic masculinity in sport and challenges to it by women. I will describe some of the attempts made by women to carve out a place for themselves in sport, from those of physical educators who created separate programs for women and girls to others by leaders of the Association for Intercollegiate Athletics for Women (AIAW), an early governing body for women’s college sport. This description places my analysis within a history of challenging the dominance of hegemonic masculinity in sport.

Chapter 3 provides a literature review of relevant sport philosophy scholarship. In this chapter I will analyze literature that addresses four specific aspects of sport that lend themselves to reform. They are: the meaning of victory, the pursuit of excellence, relationships with opponents, and relationships with teammates. These four specific issues are both central to sporting acts and highly relevant for purposes of reform. They provide potential sites for mitigating hypercompetitive attitudes and hegemonic masculinity, from a conceptual perspective.

In Chapter 4, I will make a case for the need for sport reform—both from college sport and feminist perspectives. The first section looks at a general need for reform in intercollegiate athletics, using the works of Peter French, John Thelin, and Michael Oriard. The ideas promoted here speak to corruptions that harm the human experience of sport and thus justify gender-blind reform. The second section makes a case for reform from a feminist approach relying on sport literature that focuses on integrating more inclusive perspectives in sport.
Chapter 5 focuses on describing potential reforms for sport. It delineates an approach that focuses on hyper-competitive attitudes, alternate values in sport, and interpersonal relationships. This chapter focuses on making sport better for women and men by attempting to eliminate harmful hegemonic masculine ideals. The three areas chosen for sport reform are philosophical and stem from prior scholarship noted in Chapter 3. Drawing from conceptual insights, these reforms suggest new ways to think about competition and sport.

The emphasis in this dissertation is on reform that combats the enculturation of hegemonic masculinity. It focuses on the harm to sport due to cultural practices, social pressure, learning, and other behaviors influenced by a cultural milieu steeped in hegemonic masculinity. Biology may play a role in competitive attitudes, but will not be considered in the reforms of this dissertation. However, I will include an epilogue that addresses the nature/nurture issues raised by Steven Pinker and Matt Ridley and supported by Darwinian feminists. This epilogue will suggest possible future directions for research, but will not propose reforms related to biological explanations of competition.
Chapter 1

Hegemonic Masculinity in Sport

Historically, most sports have been dominated by a model that supports and has been supported by hegemonic masculinity. This model idealizes male physiology and reifies traditionally masculine attitudes, behaviors, and mythology. In this chapter, I will argue that the hegemonic model of sport has served to marginalize and alienate female athletes as well as those men who do not meet those standards. In this chapter, I will define and analyze the concept of hegemonic masculinity following the work of R.W. Connell. Additionally, in this section, I will demonstrate how hegemonic masculinity shapes sport and influences the structure of sport institutions.

Defining Hegemonic Masculinity

In her description of hegemonic masculinity, R.W. Connell follows Jill Matthews’ concept of the “gender order.” The theory of the gender order looks at social structures and the “pattern of power relations between men and women and definitions of femininity and masculinity” (Connell, 1987, p. 99). In addition to Matthew’s gender order, Connell’s analysis of hegemonic masculinity follows the theory of hegemony presented by the Italian social theorist Antonio Gramsci.

Hegemony, for Connell, is a type of “social ascendancy” where the power structure of an institution is defined by social forces that include, but transcend, displays of physical force or economic power. Accordingly, hegemony “refers to the cultural dynamic by which a group claims and sustains a leading position in social life” (Connell,
The power is taken by broader cultural traditions and embedded in social practices, such as mass media, religious doctrines, and welfare policies (Connell, 1987, p. 184). While those in power do not necessarily assert their dominance by force, physical power and economic threats may play a role in hegemony (Connell, 1987, p. 184). Therefore, hegemony refers to a dominance that does not require force, but one that is embedded in cultural practices and takes control of the broader culture through these practices.

Hegemonic masculinity is the specific application of this theory to the way that ideas about gender are embedded in social practices. Because of this, it does not need to be practiced by a majority of men, or even a large number of them (Connell, 2005, p. 79). Instead, certain cultural ideals exert a type of institutional power. In contemporary society, examples include images in popular culture, such as the film characters played by John Wayne and Sylvester Stallone or by the real lives of celebrity athletes such as Muhammad Ali (Connell, 1987, p. 184). Other types of masculinity do exist, but the maintenance of hegemonic masculinity requires that they remain complicit. While men who exemplify complicit masculinities do not possess the characteristics of the hegemonic ideal, they still reap its benefits (Connell, 2005, pp. 79–80). These types of masculinities are constructed to “realize the patriarchal dividend, without the tensions or risks of being the frontline troops of patriarchy” (Connell, 2005, p. 79). These men need not exert actual dominance, and can maintain respect for their wives, mothers, and daughters while still reaping both abstract benefits (such as prestige and honor) and material rewards (such as higher wages and control of more capital) associated with hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 2005, pp. 80, 82). These types of masculinities are
therefore complicit in allowing for dominance and perpetuation of hegemony. In short, this sexist hegemony requires neither force nor large numbers. Instead, its dominance comes from embedded cultural practices and the complicity of those who do not actively endorse its ideals (yet still reap associated benefits).

According to Connell, hegemonic masculinity is something that guarantees, or at least seems to guarantee, the “dominant position of men and the subordination of women” (Connell, 2005, p. 77). In other words, it is a system of institutionalized domination that not only places men who display the characteristics of hegemonic masculinity in positions of power, but also a system that places women (and some men who do not fit the standards) in an inferior position. Current practices of hegemonic masculinity, among other things, serve to keep women out of powerful positions and keep men in them.

Furthermore, Connell’s definition of masculinity stems from looking at relations of power, production, and cathexis (emotional attachment) (Connell, 2005, pp. 73–74). In hegemonic masculinity, men have more power (what feminists termed patriarchy), despite the influences of feminism. Additionally, gender divisions of labor, give men the upper hand—they are paid higher wages and manage more capital by controlling things like major corporations. Finally, heterosexuality plays an important role in men’s position of power, making women the object of desire and, Connell argues, this places them in a lower social position (Connell, 2005, pp. 74–75).

The system of hegemonic masculinity not only subjugates women, because it “permits men’s collective dominance over women to continue,” but also serves to marginalize men who do not fit into what Eric Anderson calls “orthodox masculinity” (E.
Anderson, 2005, p. 340; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 840). For Anderson (2005), “orthodox masculinity” is the category of masculinity that typically describes the traditionally hegemonic type of masculinity (p. 340). Generally, those who practice orthodox masculinity adopt sexist attitudes (e.g. that women are physically inferior to men) and homophobic beliefs (e.g. that gay men must downplay their sexuality to be accepted) (E. Anderson, 2005, p. 344). Because one particular type of masculinity occupies the hegemonic place, other masculinities are marginalized. Men who are “gay, nonathletic, or feminine-acting” are on a lower rung of the gender power structure (E. Anderson, 2005, p. 340). Thus, hegemonic masculinity harms both women and men. By placing women, gay men, and feminine men in positions of low power (or even powerlessness), hegemonic masculinity serves as an exclusive site for privilege.

Connell’s work on the gender order and hegemonic masculinity has significantly influenced current studies of men and masculinity, but not without criticism. Demetrakis Z. Demetriou (2001) argues that, while hegemonic masculinity is used by many empirical researchers, no work has been done to “evaluate its theoretical merit” (p. 337). He concludes that instead of a uniform hegemonic masculinity, that masculine power is better understood as a “hybrid bloc” where non-white and non-heterosexual elements are not weaknesses (as in hegemonic masculinity) but constantly reshape the characteristics of masculinity, making it dynamic (Demetriou, 2001, p. 348). Stephen Whitehead (1999) claims that the concept of hegemonic masculinity faces problems because it “goes little way towards revealing the complex patterns of inculcation and resistance which constitute everyday life” (p. 58). For him, it “can only explain so much” (Whitehead, 1999, p. 58). Whitehead (1999) argues that hegemonic masculinity is not necessarily a weak concept,
but one that does not fully address the fluidity and multiplicity of masculinities (p. 58). Additionally, Richard Pringle (2005) notes that hegemonic masculinity is a “slippery” concept because “it is attempting to represent an unstable or contextually bound amalgam of multiple and independent discourses” (p. 267). For Pringle (2005), the inability to address “individual subjectivities” in favor of generalizations constitutes a problem for hegemonic masculinity (p. 267).

Toby Miller (1998) views Connell’s theory of hegemonic masculinity as “impressive” but questions whether or not it “allow[s] for a time when men are not being men […] when nothing they do relates to the overall domination of women or their own self-formation as a gendered group” (p. 433). For Miller (1998), hegemonic masculinity is not “site specific” and lacks a dynamic understanding of masculinity and male behavior (p. 433). He argues that the concept of hegemonic masculinity deteriorates, at least to some extent, when considering the commodification of male athletes, especially in a professionalized athletic market that not only sells sport to straight men, but to straight women, gay men, and lesbians (Miller, 1998, p. 435).

Michael Moller also finds the concept of hegemonic masculinity problematic. Moller (2007) sees hegemonic masculinity as a something that “conditions researchers to think about masculinity and power in a specific and limited way” (p. 268). This limited view, then, “tends to overdetermine gender practices” which leads to researchers ignoring other power and privilege in other locations (Moller, 2007, p. 269). For Moller, hegemonic masculinity is only a narrowly useful concept that ignores the complexities of lived masculinity.
Despite the criticisms articulated by Demetriou, Whitehead, Pringle, Miller, and Moller, Connell’s concept of hegemonic masculinity can still work as a useful concept in understanding problems related to sport. Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) acknowledge the force of some of these criticisms (and others), but argue that the concept should be upheld, albeit with some modifications (pp. 845–846). For instance, they recognize the need to transcend fixed ideas about hegemonic masculinity and acknowledge the fluidity of the construct (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 847). However, Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) contend that a large body of research demonstrates that certain types of masculinity wield more social power and authority than others (p. 846). Furthermore, they claim that observations support the idea that “hegemony works in part through the production of exemplars of masculinity (e.g., professional sports stars), symbols that have authority despite the fact that most men and boys do not fully live up to them” (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 846). The strengths of hegemonic masculinity theory therefore allow it to remain a useful, albeit imperfect, vehicle for describing power and gender relations in sport. Furthermore, the use of Connell’s theory by many sport scholars, including Michael Messner, underscores its utility in understanding the role of gender in sport. Therefore, this dissertation will use Connell’s theory as part of a suitable description of the current intercollegiate athletic milieu.
Masculine Hegemony in Sport

Connell’s definition of hegemonic masculinity permeates discussions on the roles of masculinity and femininity in sport. In *Taking the Field*, sport sociologist Michael Messner uses hegemonic masculinity and the concept of the gender order to describe the “center” of sport. For Messner (2002), the center of sport is “a position occupied by the biggest, wealthiest, and most visible sports programs and athletes. It is a site of domination and privilege” (p. xviii). Those who occupy the center of sport not only play the most popular and visible sports, but also are generally men. As Messner (2002) states, “sport’s center is still, by and large, a space that is actively constructed by and for men” (p. xviii). In other words, the center of sports is a place where men who exemplify the traits of hegemonic masculinity reap the most rewards and benefits.

Varda Burstyn (1999), in *The Rites of Men*, describes the concept of “masculinism” as the “gender dominance of men” and that it “is organized and achieved by sport” (p. 28). Burstyn’s critique of the role of hegemonic masculinity comes from the idea that sport divides people, and most problematically offers constricting and specific ideas about gender, particularly what it means to be a man and to be masculine. For her, sport and the media surrounding it “market” a form of homogenized masculinity that “delivers the male” (Burstyn, 1999, p. 103). In other words, sport maintains, markets, and reifies hegemonic masculine ideals.

The masculine ideals of sport, according to Burstyn (1999), include aggression and violence, zero-sum notions of competition, and muscularity (pp. 138–151). These ideals may also come at the expense of the male athlete, inviting risk of injury, both short
term and long term, through intense training and aggressive play (Burstyn, 1999, p. 138). Additionally, media and advertising build a discourse around sport of “narrative myths about heroism and masculinity” (Burstyn, 1999, p. 149). These myths include “‘being tough,’ ‘being competitive,’ ‘taking it,’ ‘dishing it out,’ ‘God-given talent,’ ‘backbreaking work,’ ‘winning against all odds,’ ‘going down fighting,’ ‘making a sacrifice play,’ ‘sudden death,’ and ‘winner take all’” (Burstyn, 1999, p. 149). The masculinity celebrated by sport reinforces masculine dominance and inscribes specific types of behavior (such as competitiveness and aggression) as ideal.

Just as Connell argues that a large number of men do not need to practice hegemonic masculinity, Messner (2002) finds that it is not necessary for large numbers of men to occupy the center of sport. In fact, more than likely very few people inhabit this location (pp. 29–30). However, the center remains the cultural ideal, with certain men dwelling within it, just as only men occupy the dominant power structure embedded in the practice of hegemonic masculinity.

Messner (2002) describes the power structure and practice of hegemonic masculinity in sport using three categories: leaders, audience, and marginals. The leaders are those who “perpetuate misogynistic and homophobic assault” and “who most actively conform to and directly benefit from hegemonic masculinity” (Messner, 2002, p. 36). They are the athletes who occupy the center of sport and gain the most privilege. The audience, according to Messner (2002), is the group of men or boys who “hope desperately to belong” (Messner, 2002, p. 37). To do this, they actively support the leaders, “validat[ing] the hegemony of [their] central performance” (Messner, 2002, p. 36). Finally, the marginals are the silent boys and men, who are often uncomfortable with
some of the group’s actions and “opt out of some of the group’s more cruel activities” (Messner, 2002, p. 37). While they may disagree with the misogyny and homophobia, they still feel a pull toward those in the center of the group. The complicity of the audience and the marginals allows the center to maintain its place (Messner, 2002, p. 37).

Messner illustrates the power structure by recalling a case of the gang rape of a young, high school girl by a number of high school male athletes.\(^1\) While not all the boys participated in the gang rape, their complicit behavior allowed it to occur. Citing Lefkowitz, Messner (2002) suggests that this happens because the culture of the center of sport is embedded with a culture of competitive, misogynistic, homophobic talk, voyeuring, a suppression of empathy, and a “culture of silence” (pp. 31–32). The participants demonstrated their masculine behavior by acting violently and misogynisticly, while the boys who did not intervene demonstrated complicit masculinities. While hegemonic masculinity does not require violence or rape, the actions of those in powerful positions and the silence of others leads to a culture where violence against women is not consistently and forcefully condemned.

Moreover, media portrayals of athletics highlight the center of sport. Messner concludes that certain ideals perpetuated by the media serve to keep men (and particularly white men) at the center of sport. He describes a “televised sports manhood model” that illustrates what it means to be a “real man” (Messner, 2002, pp. 112–122). He indicates a number of ways that (white) men remain in the center of sport, including the fact that men are the authority figures, where sport is “a man’s world” and women are

\(^1\) The athletes in this case are not the football players from Stubenville, Ohio. While this case may have many similarities to the one described by Messner, his book was written prior to the incident in Ohio.
merely prizes for those who are successful (Messner, 2002, pp. 112–114). Additionally, men are expected to be violent and sacrifice their bodies for the good of the team. Acts of aggression are excused because “boys will be boys” (Messner, 2002, pp. 117–120). In other words, men are supposed to be aggressive, violent, self-sacrificing (of their bodily health), winners, and anti-feminine (and even misogynistic and homophobic).

In addition to featuring men at the center of sport, the media also ignores women’s athletic performances. While representations in the media are not the only factors in deciding who or what is a cultural ideal, they do play a large role in creating an image that allows for cultural and social identities to form. Just as fantasy figures denote hegemonic masculinity for Connell (such as the roles played by John Wayne and Sylvester Stallone), real life figures that are featured in sport media also reinforce the masculine ideals present in sport. By casting these fantasy characters and sports stars as the cultural ideal, and by ignoring potential female icons, the media helps males retain their dominant position in sport and society.

This asymmetrical media coverage is highlighted in cases where male athletes who commit or are complicit in violent crimes, such as Ray Lewis, can receive positive media coverage and endorsements (such as Lewis’ McDonald’s commercial featured him answering the questions of a young girl at a press conference) while top women athletes often have to fight for even small amounts of significant coverage. Lewis, and others like him, can be forgiven for their violent behavior as part of a “boys will be boys” mentality. Meanwhile women’s sport coverage remains limited, where even the best women athletes struggle for airtime and endorsement contracts. Meanwhile, the media continues to ignore those who do not conform to the ideal and thus do not occupy the center of sport.
Hegemonic masculinity in sport harms women by subjecting them to misogynistic and violent behaviors and by ignoring their place in the athletic realm. Additionally, hegemonic masculinity harms men by alienating those men who do not fit with the orthodox masculinity valued by hegemony. It does so by prescribing particular traits to the dominant form of masculinity, privileging those who possess them, and disadvantaging those who do not.

Modern sport and the emphasis on masculinity arose, according to Messner and others, as a way to combat the “feminizing” of young boys with the rise of motherhood as a primary influence on boys’ lives. In other words, women were teaching boys how to become men. Thus, fears about a “crisis of masculinity” arose, leading to the development of sport as an arena to better teach boys what it meant to be masculine (Crosset, 1990; Kidd, 1990; Messner, 1992). With this development of sport as a masculine preserve, certain types of masculinity prevailed. According to Bruce Kidd (1990), by promoting this exclusive masculinity, “sports not only contribute to the ongoing disadvantage of women but severely limit men’s opportunities for personal growth” (p. 33).

Accordingly, Kidd identifies three problems in men’s sports that stem from this reinforcement of hegemonic masculinity. First, sport thus conceived, discourage men from building deep emotional bonds with one another and promotes closing oneself off emotionally (Kidd, 1990, p. 40). Secondly, modern sport emphasizes extrinsic rewards, particularly those associated with victory and records. This leads, according to Kidd (1990), to athletes “treat[ing] their bodies instrumentally, to undergo physical and psychological injury, and to inflict it upon others” (p. 40). Finally, sport promotes
relationships where the other is seen as an enemy. These attitudes build “enormous barriers to the development and maintenance of close relationships” (Kidd, 1990, p. 41). In other words, according to Kidd, sport built through hegemonic masculinity harms men emotionally, physically, psychologically, and relationally.

Messner also recognizes the harms associated with hegemonic masculinity and sport in relation to men. He contends that the structure of sport “is extremely hierarchical” with excessive emphasis on winning (Messner, 1992, p. 33). Because of this, boys and men experience conditional self-worth, where their acceptance by others “is contingent upon being a ‘winner’” (Messner, 1992, p. 34). Additionally, Messner finds that the exclusive definition of masculinity found within sport promotes homophobia, harming boys and men, both gay and nongay. They realize that they must participate in (or at least silently accept) homophobic and sexist banter to fit within the masculine mold. They also know that acting too feminine, by, for example, forming close emotional bonds with other boys and men, puts them at risk of being labeled a “sissy” or a “fag” (Messner, 1992, p. 36). The hierarchal and homophobic structure of sport, according to Messner, harms boys and men by encouraging only narrow definitions of success and identity.

In this dissertation, I will employ Connell’s concept of hegemonic masculinity, along with Messner, Burstyn, and Kidd’s analyses of its harms for both women and men. In the athletic realm, men are the central dominant power and exert control by demonstrating a particular type of masculinity. This dominance and hegemony allow men to construct and create sport that benefits those who fit this particular cultural ideal.
Hegemonic Masculinity and Hypercompetitiveness

For the purposes of this dissertation, I will focus on the relationship between the dominance of hegemonic masculinity and hyper-competitive behaviors in sport. These behaviors and ideals, I will argue, lie at the heart of many contemporary sport problems and ought to be the primary site for reform. Messner (1992) notes these excessively competitive attitudes and their role in sport, highlighting a number of comments from professional players and coaches that amount to this: winning is the only thing that matters (p. 45). Anything that is not pure victory, even earning a silver Olympic medal, equates to failure in the eyes of many. An ethic where “winning is everything” from “the dominant ideology of success” where the “reality that most do not ‘succeed’ brings about feelings of failure, lowered self-images, and problems with interpersonal relationships” permeates sport (Messner, 1992, p. 46).

These overly competitive beliefs and behaviors are associated with hegemonic masculinity, and thus serve to alienate and marginalize women and many men. Additionally, hypercompetitive attitudes lead to problems in other areas, specifically in de-emphasizing the importance of other values and meanings in sport and by damaging interpersonal relationships among teammates and opponents. For these reasons, I will focus the reforms of Chapter 5 on mitigating hypercompetitiveness.

The hypercompetitive attitudes I discuss are those that lead to win-at-all-costs behaviors. These attitudes are those that not only preserve victory as the primary value, but also encourage all measures to be taken in pursuing the win. This includes viewing skill development and other excellences as instrumental to victory, not as intrinsically
valuable, seeing opponents as enemies, risking physical injury, inflicting injury upon others, and when taken to the extreme, cheating and engaging in other immoral practices. For these reasons, a first step toward reforming sport must include revisions in competitive attitudes.

**A Note on Sex and Gender**

Throughout this dissertation, I will be concerned with addressing gender concerns in sport, rather than any related to sex. Typically, gender is seen as socially constructed, where cultural definitions inform what it means to be masculine or feminine. On the other hand, sex generally concerns biological definitions of male and female. My analysis and suggestions for reform, however, will be focused on how the cultural and social structure of sport promotes specific problems related to hegemonic masculinity as an exclusive form of gender. The reforms I will suggest aim primarily at cultural change in general and harmful, socially constructed gender hegemonies in particular. This, however, does not mean that sex plays no role in sporting behavior and the development of such constructs.

Steven Pinker (1997) notes that “In this scientific age, ‘to understand’ means to try to explain behavior as a complex interaction among (1) the genes, (2) the anatomy of the brain, (3) its biochemical state, (4) the person’s family upbringing, (5) the way society has treated him or her, and (6) the stimuli that impinge upon the person” (p. 53). My analysis of gender’s role in sport will address only those explanations of behavior that are cultural, namely Pinker’s points 4, 5, and 6.
Explaining the problems concerning hypercompetitive attitudes through primarily cultural means makes sense for a few reasons. First, the concept of hegemonic masculinity, as put forth by Connell, is about cultural ideals of masculinity, especially the masculinity that affords certain men power within the current social context. When implemented in the sporting context, the concept helps to explain the social structure of sport and how it has been a site for building masculine ideals. Secondly, cultural practices can change. This provides hope for the development of a more inclusive understanding of sport, sporting acts, and successful athletes. Thirdly, using cultural explanations is practical. Historically, biological explanations of competition and sport have often emphasized sex differences that indicated women's physical inferiority. Difference, in other words, is equated with inferiority.

Despite the practicality and sensibility of working with cultural and social explanations of gender and competitive behavior, I will discuss, in an epilogue, future direction for study related to biology and evolution. In this, discussion, I will attempt to integrate Pinker's first three areas for understanding and claim that, potentially, biological explanations of human behavior, combined with cultural understandings might better explain competitive behaviors and provide additional information for effecting athletic reform.
Chapter 2

Challenging the Hegemonic Model: A Historical Review of Women in Sport

Although the hegemonic model of sport has prevailed throughout history, it has not done so without some challenges. From the early years of women’s physical education, through the NCAA takeover of intercollegiate women’s sports, women physical educators and other female sport leaders challenged the men’s way of doing things. Sometimes, they succeeded by remaining in separate spheres. However, most of these efforts failed to maintain a unique system for women’s intercollegiate athletics, recreational sport, and physical education. Some of these models developed by women were compatible with and even reinforced the male ideal. For better or worse (or probably some of both) women physical educators, coaches, and administrators could not keep the hegemonic model from influencing and, from their perspective, contaminating their alternative visions for athletics and physical education for women.

Physical Education for Collegiate Women in the Late Nineteenth Century

In the mid-to late 19th century, an increasing number of women entered higher education due to the founding of women’s colleges, such as Elmira, Vassar, Mount Holyoke, Wellesley, and Smith, and because some men’s colleges in the Northeast opened their doors to female students. During this time, colleges focused on “the intellectual, moral, and physical development of their students” (Verbrugge, 1988, p. 140). This educational system sought to improve and maintain the health of female students and additionally solidified a new womanhood. According to Allen Guttmann
new female physical educators “were unmistakably ready to defy middle-class convention and proclaim ideals of physical activity that flew in the face of earlier shibboleths about delicacy and decorum. They redefined what it meant to be a lady” (p. 117). In other words, these women’s colleges began to value what Martha Verbrugge (1988) called “able-bodied womanhood.” According to Verbrugge (1988), able-bodied womanhood referred not only to biological health, but also to the social values associated with wellness and physical ability (p. 9). For many middle class women in the 1800s, able-bodied womanhood materialized through increased access to education, greater access to strenuous exercise, and some ability to take part in athletic competitions. Instead of resigning women to a life of disability and frailty, believers in able-bodied womanhood sought to increase women’s vigor through physical education. During the 19th century, women’s physical education redefined womanhood while also maintaining a separate sphere of activity from men.

Upon opening their doors, women’s colleges fought public fears that women’s health would suffer when they encountered the rigors of higher education. Schools such as Wellesley incorporated regular physical education as part of the curriculum in a concerted effort to keep their students healthy and free from chronic illness. For example, Wellesley identified specific wellness objectives and principles for its physical education program, which included:

- the participation of most, if not all, of the college’s students; reliable monitoring of each girl’s development and deficiencies; attention to the needs of frail students; effective use of the school’s facilities and grounds; and trustworthy
evidence of undergraduate health, to counter allegations about the adverse effects of female education (Verbrugge, 1988, p. 147).

In short, at Wellesley, and likely at other women’s colleges, administrators and educators were acutely aware that their mission of educating women proved problematic for many. Throughout American society, many believed that female students could not handle the stresses and strains of higher education, let alone the rigors of intense physical activity.

At first, schools, such as Wellesley, Mount Holyoke, Smith, and Vassar, used Dio Lewis’ gymnastics program, which he based on the Swedish Ling gymnastics (a program of exercise involving free movement and light apparatus work). Eventually, these women’s colleges incorporated more sports and strength training under the influences of Dudley Allen Sargent and his students (Verbrugge, 1988, p. 149). Again, employing Lewis’ and Sargent’s techniques signaled that administrators at women’s colleges realized the importance of health promotion in attacking fears about women’s low tolerance for the stresses of higher education. At Wellesley, the principles of its physical education program emphasized participation for all and the monitoring of each student’s health, with special attention to frail students in order “to counter allegations about the adverse effects of female education” (Verbrugge, 1988, p. 147). With programs like this, women’s colleges helped their students remain healthy and proved that women could and should be given the opportunity for higher education.

Later, some women’s colleges introduced sports into their physical education programs. Administrators urged Wellesley students to enjoy the spacious grounds by partaking in rowing, tennis, golf, lacrosse, archery, and baseball. However, they declared that sports should remain non-competitive, emphasizing “athletics as a source of exercise,
fun, and character building” while “they frowned on intramural games, and adamantly opposed interscholastic sports” (Verbrugge, 1988, p. 158). This opposition to competition was not unique to Wellesley. By 1900, throughout the country, male and female physical educators opposed interscholastic competition for girls and women, questioned whether competition was healthy for women, and feared that competition might produce unfeminine traits, such as aggressiveness, in women (Verbrugge, 1988, p. 159). In addition to opposing competition, female physical educators led a movement for “separate spheres,” and created amended rules for women’s sports. Often these rules sought to “eliminate roughness and to minimize the danger of overexertion” (Guttmann, 1991, p. 115). For example, physical educator Senda Berenson created rules for women’s basketball that were meant to allow women to participate in fun competition and moderate exercise. Her rules divided the court into three segments with players remaining in their specified zones, “so that no player had to dash breathlessly from one end of the court to the other” (Guttmann, 1991, p. 115). Finally, these physical educators prevented any kind of involvement of men in women’s sport. Early basketball games, both intramural and interscholastic, even barred male spectators (Guttmann, 1991, pp. 115–116).

By attempting to create physical education and sport programs attuned specifically to women, physical educators of the late 19th century, in some ways, challenged the hegemonic masculine model of sport. These physical educators produced a model of sport that focused on participation, fun, and health instead of an excessive emphasis on competition and aggression. They tried to establish a site for women’s athletic participation that took into account their unique needs as understood and
addressed by the health professions at that time. Though the rules and viewpoints of these leaders seem misguided and exaggerated by most contemporary egalitarian standards, they showed a genuine concern for women participating in sport and were based firmly on the assumption that men’s and women’s activity interests and needs were, in some ways, different.

**Women’s Physical Education in the 1920s and 1930s**

In the 1920s and 1930s, women’s physical education remained a contested domain. As sport for women progressed, and successful women athletes, such as Babe Didrikson, garnered public attention and support, female physical educators sought to keep women’s sport under their control and promoted only moderate levels of competition and physical exertion. Physical educators maintained an “ideology remarkably similar to the nineteenth-century doctrine of ‘separate spheres’” (Guttmann, 1991, p. 135). Partly, these women physical educators hoped to eliminate the excesses associated with an overemphasis on winning. They also wanted to provide women with access to sport and physical education while encouraging them to remain acceptably feminine.

During this part of the 20th century, two organizations formed that attempted to fight the “evils” associated with American women participating in highly competitive sport—the Committee on Women’s Athletics (CWA) and the Women’s Division of the National Amateur Athletic Federation (NAAF) (Cahn, 1994, p. 56). The CWA, which acted as a group within the profession of physical education, worked with the Women’s
Division, which was a group associated with the NAAF, whose mission brought together leaders in recreation programs, school sports associations, and military sport programs. Side by side, the CWA and the Women’s Division promoted, according to Cahn (1994), “the motto, ‘A Sport for Every Girl, and Every Girl in a Sport,’” and “advanced an inclusive vision of sport in which athletic access, resources, and skills would be distributed equally” (pp. 65–66). In other words, these two organizations promoted a type of physical education that focused on inclusivity and democratic ideals. Under this system, women participated in “play days” rather than competitive intercollegiate sports. During a play day, women from several colleges gathered to participate in sports, playing on mixed teams comprised of participants from all the schools. Schools provided little preparation for these women—rarely did they partake in formal, organized practice sessions. Following the play day, the women gathered for socializing and refreshments (Cahn, 1994, p. 66). The principles of play days fit with the goals of the Women’s Division. Because play days focused more on participation than competition, they maintained the notion that “the important thing in living today is the ability to co-operate with rather than eliminate or overpower one another” (Sefton, 1941, pp. 14–15).

Specifically, the Women’s Division advocated for competition where “schools and colleges, clubs, groups, and communities should get together occasionally to play with each other and compete with each other” but “that these contacts should be so organized and carried through that the importance of the championship is minimized” (Sefton, 1941, p. 29).

Physical educators’ insistence on separately designed programs for women that focused more on health and participation rather than winning and competitive excellence
arose for multiple reasons. First, women physical educators were concerned that women would lose their “femininity” if they participated in strenuous, competitive sport. According to Cahn (1994), female physical educators believed that highly competitive sport endangered the female athlete and that it resulted in “a loss of essential ‘womanly’ qualities,” leading women to become too masculine (p. 56). Furthermore, critics of competitive sport for women especially focused on keeping women feminine, where “what mattered most...was that, at bottom, the true nature of a girl was not boylike” (Cahn, 1994, p. 63, emphasis original).

Secondly, women physical educators and organizations like the Women’s Division clung to the belief that women were physically inferior to men, principally due to differences in their reproductive systems. Despite the lack of evidence that exercise negatively impacted a woman’s reproductive health, women physical educators typically sought to limit vigorous physical activity (Cahn, 1994, pp. 62–63). Moreover, the Women’s Division claimed, “It is essential that when the rhythm of growth is accelerated, as in adolescence, the physical reserves not be used up in too compelling an athletic program” (Sefton, 1941, p. 14). Those that led women’s physical education and created athletic programs for girls and women believed that women should not participate at the same level or as vigorously as men.

The platform of the Women’s Division of the NAAF clearly illustrates the new model of sport women physical educators of the 1920s and 1930s hoped to create. Their principles aimed to “promote competition that stresses enjoyment of sport and the development of good sportsmanship and character” rather than promoting winning and attaining records (Sefton, 1941, p. 13). Additionally, the Women’s Division highly
valued long term benefits, from improving skills to developing strong personal relationships (Sefton, 1941, p. 13). Furthermore, the Women’s Division even warned educators against media coverage of play days, asking that the press emphasize the inclusiveness, skills, and joy of the events rather than singling out specific, highly talented individuals. They worried that coverage of “girl wonders” was detrimental to the lives of their athletes, because, “To live up to such a publicized level of achievement is an undesirable goal, for it disregards the physical and emotional stresses a girl may have to endure to win her laurels” (Sefton, 1941, p. 16).

Although the Women’s Division feared that the pressure of intense competition could be harmful to sportswomen, they did not promote the wholesale elimination of it from athletics. They believed that the problems associated with competition stemmed from an “intense, highly specialized type of competition” found in events like intercollegiate sport, the Olympic Games, and international championships (Sefton, 1941, p. 29). Instead of this intense contesting, the Women’s Division promoted competition as a “means to wholesome, healthful enjoyments, rather than as an end in itself” (Sefton, 1941, p. 30). Therefore, the model of sport promoted by female physical educators was one that focused on developing athletic skills, building social relationships, and including all women, regardless of skill level.

Women’s physical education posed a significant challenge to the dominant, hegemonic model of sport. It regarded the hypercompetitive attitudes of this model of athletics dangerous and sought to remedy them by eliminating hard fought competitions from its designs. While these physical educators demonstrated progressive ideals in some ways—many groups, such as peace organizations, social workers, and reformers of
women’s education, used the strategy of separating women to create solidarity. In others, women physical educators continued to repress female athletes (Cahn, 1994, p. 67). Though they claimed to reject Victorian ideals, women physical educators still “retained a middle-class emphasis on self-control and modesty: The ideal athlete would blend earlier bourgeois virtues of control and refinement with contemporary assets of vibrancy and physical competency” (Cahn, 1994, p. 74). Despite their efforts to retain control over women’s physical education and sport, groups such as the Women’s Division and CWA eventually lost their hold as more and more women wanted to take part in elite level competition. However, many physical education leaders maintained these ideals and positions until the 1950s (Cahn, 1994, p. 80).

Physical Education and the Rise of Women’s Intercollegiate Sport

In the 1950s, with tensions rising in the Cold War, the Amateur Athletic Union (AAU) called for more female athletes to participate in the Olympic Games. However, female leaders in sport and physical education found this disagreeable. Members of the National Section for Girls’ and Women’s Sports (NSGWS) and the National Association for the Physical Education of College Women (NAPECW) agreed that Olympic development ran afoul of their ideals. According to historian Mary Jo Festle (1996), the NSGWS and NAPECW believed that “[v]ictory should not be the primary goal” and that “sports should be conducted for the good of the participant” (Festle, 1996, p. 11). If women were to be trained as Olympians, they would be expected to follow a model of sport that focused on winning, competition, and allowing only the best to participate. For
the NSGWS, sport participants, “came to appreciate companionship, experienced growth in desirable personality traits, admired skills in others, and were satisfied with a game well played regardless of who won” (Festle, 1996, p. 14). On the other hand they believed that contests with “low participation levels, poor sportsmanship, commercialism, exhaustion, and sensationalism,” characteristics attributed to most elite and intercollegiate men’s sports, were undesirable for their female students (Festle, 1996, p. 11). To combat the AAU’s proposal, the NAPECW and NSGWS outlined their model in *Standards in Sports for Girls and Women*, highlighting their principles of participation, cooperation, and skill development.

During this time period, women physical educators opposed extramural and varsity competition. While they did not officially prohibit these games, they clearly discouraged women from participating in them (Festle, 1996, p. 15). Instead, women in the 1950s continued to participate in play days, with friendly, low-pressure competition and post-game socialization over refreshments. Instead of pursuing competitive intercollegiate sports, women students were encouraged to take part in events that emphasized cooperation and participation. This system, according to Festle (1996), “produced an alternative to the dominant male form of college sports, one that had some positive attributes” (p. 16). Female physical educators avoided some of the excesses associated with varsity sports, did not allow sports to overshadow the educational experience, and successfully prevented sports from becoming hyper-competitive (Festle, 1996, p. 16).

However, despite the positives associated with this model, highly skilled and motivated women experienced limited opportunities to pursue their interests. Therefore,
the Division of Girls’ and Women’s Sports (DGWS, the former NSGWS) worked to provide more opportunities for these women and girls. Additionally, as the United States became embroiled in the Cold War conflict with the Soviet Union, state politicians began to see the importance of emphasizing physical education for both men and women. As Katherine Ley noted, “It is obvious that officials of the national government regard excellence in sports as an essential weapon in the Cold War” (quoted in Festle, 1996, p. 95). Although this ran counter to the goals of traditional women’s physical education, the leaders in the NAPECW and DGWS decided that they should change their model in order to receive state sponsorship. They believed that “they could take a new step (encouraging Olympic athletes) without losing sight of traditional goals” (Festle, 1996, p. 95).

Although women’s physical education began to change, leaders emphasized the fact that they allowed more competitive sports for reasons larger than demonstrations of national pride and strength (Festle, 1996, p. 96). While leaders in the DGWS were willing to lend more support to athletic competition, they still “preferred the tone of cultural interchanges and Peace Corps sports programs over militaristic and nationalistic events” (Festle, 1996, p. 97). Furthermore, they hoped that their participation would lead to changes in international competition. According to Festle (1996), “They wanted to set an example and help shift the emphasis from the outcome of an event to the personal satisfaction individuals derived from it” (p. 97). Furthermore, PE leaders thought that their alliance with the government would aid their primary cause—wide scale participation. They thought it was possible that more intense training for highly skilled athletes would produce trickle-down effects for the fitness of “the many” (Festle, 1996, p. 97).
Therefore, in the 1950s, women physical educators posed an alternative to the masculine, hegemonic model. They explicitly stated their distaste for the excesses associated with men’s sports and actively fought to create a model of physical education that supported participation, satisfaction, and skill development. Though they supported increased competition, they still maintained a separate model.

The NCAA, the AIAW, and the Fight for Women’s Intercollegiate Competition in the 1970s

Perhaps one of the most important challenges to masculine hegemony came from the AIAW and their attempt to govern women’s college sports separately from the NCAA. Their vision of sports demonstrated that a viable model of sport that eschewed some of the problems associated with a hegemonic model existed. However, despite the strengths associated with the AIAW’s model, masculine hegemony prevailed. Despite good intentions (and some clear-headed ideals), the AIAW provided a flawed model for intercollegiate sport. A refusal to allow for athletic scholarships, mounting legal troubles, and a fracturing of the membership due to ideological differences both depicted the imperfections of the model and contributed to the downfall of the organization.

In January 1966, the DGWS established the Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics for Women (CIAW), in part as a response to the NCAA’s 1964 policy limiting participation to men only (Wushanley, 2004, pp. 36–37). Despite their rule prohibiting women’s national championships, the NCAA at the time began to show some potential interest in changing their ban and taking on the governance of women’s college sport. Because of this, women leaders in the DGWS, anxious to retain control women’s
collegiate sports, needed to create an organization to offer women’s national championships. By December 7, 1967, the CIAW announced at a national press conference that they would hold national championships for women’s college athletics (Wushanley, 2004, p. 44). The CIAW hoped to promote a “somewhat conservative attempt to keep women’s sports unique and woman-defined” in order to avoid the problems associated with men’s sports, such as the loss of “an educational outlook,” commercialism, scandals, and “‘the most devitalizing, destructive aspect of sport—the almost insane compulsion to win at any cost’” (Festle, 1996, p. 98). Perhaps one of the more unique and “radical departure[s] from the male model” was a policy that did not allow scholarships based on athletic talent. This served to keep students priorities aligned with education and to keep coaches focused on teaching rather than recruiting (Festle, 1996, p. 98). While the CIAW promoted women’s sport and competition, it also maintained a traditional and conservative bias (Festle, 1996, p. 100). The CIAW wanted women to remain “feminine” and wanted sport to emphasize this femininity, not detract from it. Because of this, they advocated for certain kinds of female physical educators and “denounced ‘unfeminine’ women” (Festle, 1996, p. 100).

Eventually, administrative and financial issues caused concern among female leaders about the stability of the CIAW. According to Wushanley (2004), NCAA leaders Charles M. Neinas and Ernest B. McCoy met with DGWS officials Lucille Magnusson and Martha Adams in Atlantic City to discuss the future of the CIAW (p. 48). They “suggested to the women that an institutionally oriented organization, rather than one composed of individual educators, would be better qualified to administer a national athletic program for women” (Wushanley, 2004, p. 48). As a result, the CIAW proposed
an “institutional membership organization,” and with DGWS approval, the Association for Intercollegiate Athletics for Women (AIAW) officially replaced the CIAW as the arbiter of women’s intercollegiate sports on June 1, 1972 (Wushanley, 2004, p. 48).

Even in its earliest formation, the AIAW and its leaders faced masculine hegemony. The DGWS felt compelled to conform, at least in part, to the male model presented by the NCAA (and its representatives Neinas and McCoy) by following their suggestion of institutional membership. In order to escape financial collapse, administrative failure, and the grasp of the NCAA, the DGWS sacrificed part of their close relationship to physical education.

Although the AIAW conformed to the same institutional membership model of the NCAA, they still maintained a separate model of competition. They believed in an educational model with an “objection to awarding athletic scholarships, financial awards, and financial assistance” (Wushanley, 2004, p. 53). Although the AIAW eventually dropped their no-scholarship rule, they maintained what Festle (1996) described as an “alternative vision” (p. 124). This “alternative vision” centered on the education of the athletes in question—allocating scholarship money only after securing funds for competitive opportunities, giving scholarships to those who would benefit from education, not only for athletic opportunity, requiring athletic staffs to dedicate time to the program as a whole, not to recruiting future athletes, and maintaining the focus of athletic programs as the “enrichment of the athlete’s life” (Festle, 1996, p. 124). Because the women leaders of the AIAW valued competitive opportunities for women in all sports, they rejected the hegemonic model of the NCAA, where minor men’s sports received little time, attention, and funding, while major male sports received large
budgets for recruiting and scholarships (Festle, 1996, p. 124). However, the AIAW fought an uphill battle to maintain their “alternative vision.” As Festle (1996) states, “The male athletic model was firmly entrenched, very popular, and successful. No one knew whether, in an arena men had already staked out as their own, it would be possible for a female-defined alternative to thrive” (pp. 124–125).

In fact, it was not possible to thrive—or even to survive. Led to its death by fractions within its own organization and by the absorption of women’s college sports into the NCAA, the AIAW’s existence officially ended in 1984, after a long legal battle (Wushanley, 2004, p. 148). The AIAW faced a number of difficulties—including financial struggles. After facing a lawsuit due to their lack of scholarships, and because of the NCAA’s new co-ed policy, the AIAW felt that it needed to retain legal counsel (Wushanley, 2004, p. 111). However, this representation cost the AIAW a significant portion of its budget during the majority of its existence (1974-1982). In these years, they spent an average of 21.5% of their income on legal representation, compared to only 8% for its national championship program (Wushanley, 2004, p. 117).

Additionally, rifts within the organization signaled the demise of the AIAW. As legal counsel for the AIAW, Margot Polivy noted that (in response to some of the membership’s issues with a legal retainer), the conflict within the organization signaled, “a political and ideological disagreement as to: whether the AIAW should remain a separate organization dedicated to furthering women’s intercollegiate athletic programs or be subjugated or replaced by an existing men’s organization” (quoted in Wushanley, 2004, p. 122). Indeed, the crusade led by the University of New Mexico’s Linda Estes against the retention of Polivy as legal counsel did eventually come to a head,
underscoring some members’ belief in the short-sightedness of the AIAW’s vision. Within the AIAW, factions formed around two opinions—on the one hand, some sought an “alternative model” for women’s intercollegiate sport, while on the other hand, others (including Linda Estes) “believed that women deserved the same opportunities as men” (Wushanley, 2004, p. 136). Those in the second camp eventually formed their own organization, the Council of Collegiate Women Athletic Administrators (CCWAA). The CCWAA sided with the NCAA vision of sport and opposed the model presented by the AIAW (Wushanley, 2004, p. 137). This ideological split between women athletic leaders contributed to the eventual demise of the AIAW.

The NCAA’s growing interest in governing women’s college sport exacerbated the problems facing the already fractured AIAW. At the January 1981 NCAA convention, the organization voted to host twenty-nine national championships for women in Divisions I, II, and III, with nine of those championships for Division I (Wushanley, 2004, p. 139). Additionally, the NCAA’s plan did not require its member institutions to participate in these women’s championships—they were free to remain members of the AIAW (Wushanley, 2004, p. 139). However, a number of members left the AIAW in 1981-1982, including a majority of its top finishers in the 1980-1981 AIAW championships, causing the AIAW to lose significant amount of revenue from membership dues, television contracts with NBC and ESPN, and major commercial sponsorship from Eastman Kodak and the Broderick Company (sports apparel) (Wushanley, 2004, p. 140). In a final attempt to save their organization, members of the AIAW decided to end normal business and focus solely on an ill-fated lawsuit against the NCAA (Wushanley, 2004, p. 141). On February 25, 1983 the court ruled in favor of the
NCAA and fifteen months later, a circuit court rejected the AIAW’s appeal (Wushanley, 2004, pp. 148–149). After this devastating loss, the AIAW ceased to exist.

**Conclusion**

The fate of the AIAW represents the continual uphill battle faced by women athletes, coaches, administrators, and physical educators in attempting to develop a place in sport sheltered from what were seen as the harmful effects of hegemonic masculinity. The ideals associated with hegemonic masculinity in sport persist today, despite numerous attempts to resist them. No challenge to this model achieved any significant degree of success, even if the women who defied hegemonic masculinity designed new programs with what they saw as reasonable guidelines or truths about creating a more ethically defensible sport experience. Those attempting to maintain control of women’s sport, from the CWA to the AIAW, fought against the hegemonic ideals of the institutions run by men. Ultimately, due to ideological struggles, financial problems, and legal troubles, the goals and missions of these groups could no longer resist the institutional and social power of hegemonic masculinity, wielded by organizations like the NCAA. Eventually, women physical educators, administrators, and coaches began promoting competitive sports. Men and women typically began to receive physical education taught with similar or the same standards in mind. Despite challenges to hegemonic masculinity, this model of sport prevailed.

This is not entirely unfortunate. It is clear that some of these challenges from women physical educators and sport administrators were misdirected. In this dissertation
I will not argue that all recommended alternatives to hegemonic masculinity present useful or wholly desirable options. Stereotypical ideals of femininity and beliefs about women’s physical frailty and weakness influenced much of the rhetoric of women physical educators in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Their values discouraged women from taking part in highly skilled, elite athletics. Additionally, more recent iterations of female leaders challenging the hegemonic norm, such as those members of the AIAW, suffered similar problems as their physical education foremothers. Their initial rejection of athletic scholarships prevented women from receiving the same sporting opportunities as their male counterparts. These systems ignored the needs of those women and girls who wished for more than increased health and participation for all. In an effort to provide basic benefits, such as health, character development, skill advancement, and self-respect, available to all who participate in sport, the models provided by women physical educators sacrificed scarce benefits. Their models did nothing to provide scarce benefits of monetary compensation, scholarships, or even fame and celebrity to those women whose skills and competitive excellence warranted such reward (for further discussion on basic and scarce benefits, see English (1978)). While educational aims are admirable, ultimately, they failed to provide for the needs of gifted and highly motivated women athletes.

While these attempts to provide a model of sport for women were, in some ways, anachronistic, they were also well-intended may have included at least kernels of truth. For example, potential problems with excessive competition likely provides a key insight into some of the harms associated with intercollegiate sport today. Additionally, the AIAW’s guidelines that placed education first might alleviate some contemporary issues
surrounding professionalism, amateurism, and academic problems. Therefore, I will situate my dissertation within this historical context as a new or updated challenge to hegemonic masculinity. My claim is the following: the male hegemonic model of intercollegiate sport (particularly at Division I level) is indefensible. Consequently, suggestions of reform in the following chapters will focus on creating a model of sport that is better for all.
Chapter 3

Literature Review

Throughout sport philosophy literature, scholars identify, analyze, and discuss a number of problems in sport, from the role of competition to the relationships between opponents and teammates. Their scholarship proposes a variety of solutions and new ways of thinking about the major issues facing contemporary athletics. In many ways, these philosophers level critiques at modern athletics while also recognizing the importance of sport in contemporary culture. Their arguments support the idea that reform is necessary to improve sport and to allow for increased flourishing for athletes.

Four particular areas present important areas for analysis—meaning of victory, pursuit of excellence, relationships with opponents, and relationships with teammates. While this is not an exhaustive review of reform literature, it does highlight some of the most important areas for potential reform. These four areas provide a basis for reform arguments by providing clues for locating particular places where sport can either continue on a harmful path or change for the better. Additionally, I chose these four areas for their potential to help re-describe, from a philosophic standpoint, how we can and ought to encounter sporting competition. Conceptually, the meaning of victory, pursuit of excellence, relationships with opponents, and relationships with teammates all provide sites for logical alternatives to current iterations of competition. They demonstrate the potential for possibilities and value decisions that differ from the corrupted form of
competition often practiced today. Importantly, the scholarship of this literature review will help guide the following chapters in their aim to transform sport for all.

**Meaning of Victory**

In the philosophy of sport, many authors focus their analysis on the metaphysics of competition and the meaning of victory and defeat. Some scholars (e.g., Feezell, 2004; Fraleigh, 1984) addressed the issue of hyper-competition and the over-emphasis on winning in contemporary Western sport. They claim that overemphasizing winning leads to numerous problems—recruiting violations, cheating, substance abuse, and misbehavior by fans, among them. Others (Carr, 1999; Dixon, 1992) focus on the meaning of victory, in particular the merit that accompanies winning. They note that the best players cannot always be described as a winner and that other elements, such as luck, chance, genetic endowments, inaccurate scoring mechanisms, and umpiring errors play a role in athletic success.

Additionally, a number of scholars discuss competition and winning in terms of play, especially those that associate good competition with playful attitudes (Clifford & Feezell, 1997; de Koven, 1978; Feezell, 2004; Hyland, 1990). Philosophers also question the dichotomies associated with winning and losing. Some of these analyses look at Zen approaches to sport, from practicing Japanese archery with a Zen master to applying Zen Buddhist principles to Western sport (Herrigel, 1999; Richardson, 2012). Finally, this portion of the literature review will conclude with an analysis of ties and a reconsiderations of their importance (Torres & McLaughlin, 2003).
This literature demonstrates a particular criticism of contemporary sport, namely that modern athletics focus excessively on competition and the need to win. Such excesses even distort meanings and values associated with victory. Importantly, pointed criticisms of such distortions provide potential solutions for specific problems in sport related to competition and the quest for victory. Some of these ideas will be useful for understanding and initiating sport reform, as discussed in the following chapters.

Hypercompetition and Over-Emphasizing Winning

While many sport philosophers analyze potential problems with corrupt forms of competition, others argue that competition is by nature problematic. The psychologist Alfie Kohn (1992) leads the scholarship in this domain and provides a “radical critique” where he argues that “competition is an inherently undesirable arrangement” (pp. 9–10). Kohn’s (1992) contention that “In the case of competition, the root cause of abuses is the competitive structure itself,” demonstrates that his belief that eliminating competition is the only way to rectify problems within sporting activities (p. 161). Most sport philosophers disagree with Kohn’s sentiments. Although many criticize excessive competition, they recognize the importance of it and support the possibility of good and healthy contests. This literature review follows in the tradition of these philosophers rather than the radical works opposing competition.

Some authors who note the problems associated with an over-emphasis on winning and competition focus their analyses on contemporary attitudes toward winning. Drew Hyland (1990) recognizes that this problem stems from the appeal of activities
“where winning is at stake” (p. 35). However, Hyland (1990) claims that the athlete’s desire to win “translates into the desire to beat someone” (p. 36). In other words, Hyland implies that sport participants not only focus on doing their best, but on taking something away from someone else. Furthermore, Hyland (1990) believes that major issues in contemporary sport, such as cheating, intentionally causing injury to opponents, treating opponents as enemies, and illegal drug use stem from the over-emphasis on winning (pp. 36, 42–43). This comes from a “distorted competitive spirit” where winning is placed in a “false dichotomy of either/or alternatives,” illustrated by the platitudes, “Winning isn’t everything it’s the only thing” and “It’s not whether you win or lose, but how you play the game” (Hyland, 1990, p. 37).

Additionally, Hyland sees, in overly competitive sport, the potential for alienation, where athletes withdraw from human interactions with opponents, seeing them only as objects. However, Hyland claims that sport can lead to friendship. Hyland’s positions on alienation, friendship, and competition will be explored in further detail in the section concerning relationships with opponents.

Warren Fraleigh echoes many of Hyland’s concerns. In his discussion of the meaning of winning, losing, playing well, and playing poorly, Fraleigh (1984) notes that a focus on winning is problematic and does not honor the moral point of view. Namely, desires for exclusive possession of victory cannot be universalized. Victory cannot be shared, and thus outcomes conceptualized in exclusive terms are not good for everyone alike.

To make this argument, Fraleigh (1984) articulates four possible scenarios for the outcome of a competition—one can win and play well, win and play poorly, lose and
play well, and lose and play poorly (pp. 61–62). Depending on the athlete’s value system, preferences and rankings will differ. For example, if the player values the end result, then he or she will take winning as the highest good, despite playing poorly. On the other hand, if an athlete values the process (how one plays), then he or she will see playing well as the highest good, regardless of the competitive outcome (Fraleigh, 1984, pp. 61–62). Playing well can be universalized. It can be “meant for everyone.” Therefore, for Fraleigh, the most defensible choice is to first focus on playing well, followed by a focus on winning. He states, “A normative meaning is preferable when derived from emphasis on the positive process of both contestants playing well and, at the same time, determining winner and loser, because when all contestants play well, it is for the good of everyone alike” (Fraleigh, 1984, pp. 66–67). So, Fraleigh considers the emphasis on an exclusive objective like winning problematic from a normative standpoint.

Clifford and Feezell (1997) also note that over-emphasizing winning creates problems for athletes and coaches. They claim that coaches, players, and fans often take sport too seriously and see “a monumental difference between playing the game as if it were the only thing in the world that mattered and truly believing it is the only thing in the world that matters” (Clifford & Feezell, 1997, p. 91). Furthermore, they argue that sport falls along a continuum between two extremes—winning must be pursued at all costs and winning does not matter (“it’s only a game”) where either end of the spectrum has its own set of problems. For Clifford and Feezell (1997), competition must reside somewhere between excessive seriousness and excessive playfulness. Therefore, while they agree that winning is important, they suggest that sport can find a better balance between and exclusive focus on victory and playful attitudes. Further discussion of
Clifford and Feezell’s position on balancing playfulness and seriousness can be found in the review of good competition and playfulness.

These authors all demonstrate that an over-emphasis on winning leads to moral and normative problems in sport. It causes poor behavior and contributes to ethical dilemmas. Overall, hypercompetitive behaviors, rather than enabling competitors to be successful, actually diminish the positive values associated with sports including positive interpersonal virtues (such as trust) and relationships (such as friendship). In this case, these philosophers advocate for a new focus that favors the process of winning over the product, shared outcomes over exclusive possessions, play attitudes over excessively serious intent, striving for excellence over less noble objectives, and treating competitors respectfully as enablers rather than enemies as possible solutions to the problem.

**The Merit in Victory**

In a discussion related to over-emphasizing winning, some authors argue that winning does not mean as much as many in hyper-competitive cultures think it does. Nicholas Dixon (1992) claims that certain instances of competition fail to determine the athletic superiority of one athlete or team over the other. He argues that “failed contests”—where competitive sport fails to measure athletic superiority—can occur for a number of reasons, including refereeing errors, cheating, and gamesmanship (e.g., strategic fouls) (Dixon, 1992, pp. 10–15). Dixon (1992) questions the cultural over-emphasis of winning because “while regarding the winner as the better athlete is generally a harmless convention, on some occasions it leads to inaccurate judgments of
athletic superiority” (p. 19). Overall, Dixon’s argument embraces a de-emphasis on winning precisely because it may not tell us what it purports to—namely, who the best athlete is. He advocates for athletes to “weaken the obsession with winning” and focus on the other possible excellences that occur in sport (Dixon, 1992, p. 24).

In similar fashion, David Carr (1999), argues that athletes cannot take credit for their achievements because being tall or having a genetic gift for acquiring athletic skills does not constitute things for which athletes can take credit. He calls for modesty in achievement, lessening the impact of winning in sport (Carr, 1999, p. 9). Carr (1999) states, “[t]he answer, if there is one, can only lie in some overhaul of the educational, moral, and spiritual ethos—not least our conceptions of what constitute proper attitudes toward sporting achievement” (p. 8). For Carr, the problem lies in attitudes toward achievement. He goes on to say “we need, I suspect, to promote attitudes of proper disinterested detachment from personal achievement” (Carr, 1999, p. 8). In other words, Carr suggests that what is needed to fix sport is a de-emphasis of winning and false attributions related to achievement.

Dixon and Carr acknowledge that the outcome of a contest cannot provide all relevant information about athletes, winners and losers alike. Both of these philosophers point toward a potential problem in sport—the idea that “winning is the only thing.” Dixon and Carr stress the differences between the best athletes and the winning athletes by recognizing that winning is only one aspect of sporting excellence, thereby eliminating some of the problems associated with hypercompetitive attitudes. Because winning paints an inaccurate picture of the sporting contest, it loses some of its significance. According to Dixon and Carr, winning means less than most believe it does.
**Good Competition and Playful Attitudes**

Some sport philosophers suggest that we can combat the problems that arise with an over-emphasizing winning by seeing play as an important part of competition. As noted, Clifford and Feezell (1997) believe that sport requires a balance between seriousness and playfulness. For them, this balance allows “other important values […] to flourish” (p. 14). Furthermore, competition thrives on an athlete’s ability to play. Clifford and Feezell (1997) contend that, “If it’s valuable to play, then my opponent is valuable to me; without an opponent I can’t play. On the playing field ‘cooperative’ and ‘competitive’ learning are not opposites, for good competition is cooperation” (p. 13). In other words, good competition embodies a playful attitude, both toward the outcome of the contest and toward the opponents who cooperate to create the game. In order for these good competitions to occur, one may play the game as if it is the only thing that matters, but must be careful not to take this too seriously—if he or she does, he or she will lose the play spirit (Clifford & Feezell, 1997, pp. 91–92).

Feezell further maintains that play can be an integral part of athletic contests and that it helps mediate the competitive aspects of it. To achieve this, Feezell (2004) follows Thomas Nagel’s “view from nowhere” and, in line with this, argues that “[t]he appropriate attitude for the reflective sports participant is irony” (p. 74). In this case, Feezell (2004) is talking about irony, not as part of language, but as “an attitude of detached awareness of incongruity” where sport participants regard “the pursuit of athletic excellence and the desire for victory, as if it really matters, while at the same time recognizing that it is relatively trivial in the larger scheme of things” (p. 74).
Consequently, Feezell advocates that opponents adopt an attitude where they both take the competition seriously and also recognize that, in the grand scale of the world, winning a game does not really matter. Along with irony, Feezell (2004) suggests that athletes adopt a posture of humility, where athletes can “come to grips with [their] capacity to step back from [their] participation in sports while at the same time sustaining [their] commitment” (pp. 74–75). In Feezell’s (2004) view, what he calls the “athletic ironist” acts in a way that his “playfulness reinforces his humility and moderates his competitiveness” (pp. 75–76). Feezell’s position is one that allows for athletes to care about victory, but also mandates that they should also, on some level, recognize that winning does not really matter—good athletes act playfully and experience sport ironically.

Ironic seriousness can also be found in Bernard Suits’ (2005) argument in *The Grasshopper* as he explores the notion that the game-playing is the “ideal of existence” (p. 149). In some ways, this means that playing games must be taken seriously. Though much of this text serves to define games and defend this definition (and sport philosophers generally cite the text for this reason), Suits concludes his philosophic storytelling by claiming that the Seekers and Strivers of Utopia, a place devoid of any instrumental activity, must find something to do with their time. Since they need not engage in manual labor or truth seeking, Suits (through the voice of the Grasshopper) argues that the residents of Utopia will engage in game playing. Importantly for Suits, these games must be intrinsically satisfying and freely chosen (Suits, 2005, pp. 154–160). In other words, Utopians must play.
In the introduction to *The Grasshopper*, the philosopher Thomas Hurka (2005) notes that people in Utopia, “willingly pursue a goal by what they recognize aren’t the most efficient means” (p. 13). In other words, Hurka (2005) highlights Suits’ claim that “the central Utopian activity shows that game-playing is the supreme intrinsic good” (p. 13). Hurka and Suits’ comments both emphasize the relationship between Utopia and play. While game-playing is the central activity in Suits’ Utopia, it is most important characterized by the notion that Utopians freely choose activities that are intrinsically meaningful.

Additionally, Hurka argues that Suits’ view of the good is modern—it focuses on the process, where an undertaking (i.e. playing a game) is done just to be doing it (Hurka, 2005, p. 19). This contrasts the classic Aristotelian view that the good is the goal achieved. By taking a modern view, Hurka explains, Suits opens intrinsically valuable activities to a larger group of people instead of the elite, for whom the classic view reserved these pursuits. Because everyone can play games, everyone can value the process of game playing and seek favorable outcomes if they mattered.

Play’s relationship with the goals of sport is a central element to Bernard de Koven’s practical analysis of sport. de Koven (1978) argues that, instead of winning, the ultimate goal of sport should be to play. According to de Koven, (1978) “Winning isn’t enough. It doesn’t provide us with a clear sense of completion. It doesn’t work to end the game the way we want to end it—satisfied, accomplished, fulfilled” (p. 170). For him, winning merely ends the game, it is not a goal for which athletes should strive. de Koven (1978) suggests that playful experiences in games can come from a “loving opposition” where each participant provides and hopes to provide meaningful challenges (p. 100). For
de Koven, competition is a basis for playful activity. Victory means very little where there is no joy.

Though the conceptions of play provided by Feezell, Suits, Hurka, and de Koven may look slightly different on the surface, the belief that joy and other intrinsically satisfying experiences can be found in competitions, regardless of whether or not an athlete wins or loses, underlies their arguments. While it may always be sweeter to win, other benefits can be found in the sporting realm, regardless of victory or loss. These authors suggest that sport and competition should be considered primarily playful activities. Losing the play attitude risks the intrinsic goods of sport by taking competition too seriously. Therefore, those following Feezell, Suits, Hurka, and de Koven might reconceptualize sport and competition as activities that value playfulness. Instead of focusing winning as the ultimate outcome, sportspeople can instead enjoy the process of playing games and participating in athletics, with less regard for victory.

**Criticisms of Winning and Losing as Dichotomous**

Some philosophers have noted the problems associated with dichotomous interpretations of winning and losing. Eugen Herrigel’s (1999) assessment of Zen and Japanese archery is also helpful in understanding alternate visions of victory and defeat. He notes that dichotomies do not have a place in Zen practice. Herrigel’s lessons with Master Awa demonstrate essential Zen principles—unconscious behavior and oneness with the bow and arrow. In particular, Herrigel argues that, in archery, one must never focus on his or her achievements. He states that pupils find danger “Not […] in wasting
himself in idle self-gratification […] but rather the danger of getting stuck in his achievement, which is confirmed by his success and magnified by his renown” (Herrigel, 1999, pp. 43–44). In other words, the Master urges practitioners of Zen archery to avoid celebrations. For instance, Herrigel (1999) recalled that after he released a good shot, the Master proclaimed, “Now go on practicing as if nothing has happened” (p. 53).

Furthermore, the Master noted that “You know already that you should not grieve bad shots; learn now not to rejoice over the good ones” (Herrigel, 1999, p. 60). In other words, those that practice Zen archery must live in the moment, never focusing on success or failure, on winning or losing.

In a similar vein, Brian Richardson takes a Zen approach to Western sport practices, emphasizing the importance each moment in sport and the possible transcendence associated with athletics, rather than focusing on victory (and failure). Using Zen, Richardson (2012) claims that achievement is much more diverse, suggesting that “The cut point is neither good nor bad, it is just a point according to Zen tenets. On any given scale of achievement, there are many points that can be attained in the journey we have taken” (p. 149). In other words, the recognition of success is not merely victory or loss—it can vary by degree. Furthermore, Zen lends itself to “a more enlightened state for the athlete” eliminating the strong focus on winning and losing often found in modern sport (Richardson, 2012, p. 150). Zen discredits the “dichotomy of winning vs. losing,” indicating that an emphasis on victory and failure causes people to stray from this potential path towards enlightenment (Richardson, 2012, p. 150). Overall, Richardson’s approach draws from Zen Buddhism’s stance that winning and losing are improper determinants of success. A victory cannot serve as an accurate measurement for success.
Richardson and Herrigel both highlight a transformative perspective towards winning and losing. By living in the moment, athletes need not focus on wins and losses. Instead, they make attempts, improve, and move on. This attitude eliminates the dichotomy between winning and losing because one never even really considers these options. By eliminating the opposition between victory and failure, Richardson and Herrigel point to an area of possible change in athletics. Their analyses demonstrate that athletic achievement may be found within a blend of success and failure. Therefore, their arguments can be seen as recommendations for a greater focus on skill development rather than emphasizing the need to win.

The Validity of Ties

Finally, Torres and McLaughlin (2003) discredit the absolute nature of the meaning of victory by presenting a defense of ties in sporting contests. For these authors, ties are valid resolutions to sporting contests—one that demonstrates that “the abilities of the competing agents are not distinguishable” (Torres & McLaughlin, 2003, p. 147). They note the importance of a tie and how it describes the relationship between two opponents. According to Torres and McLaughlin (2003), ties are “so poignant a description” that “suggests how inextricably bound […] the two contesting agents are” (p. 147). Torres and McLaughlin (2003) note that most people have a problem with ties because they are “outcome seekers” where “The desire to win overrides the appreciation of the quality of performance” (p. 150). In other words, Torres and McLaughlin find it problematic that winning is given so much emphasis—so much so that in many cases,
contests resort to tie-breakers in order to artificially designate a winner, even when neither competitor clearly demonstrated superior skills. In fact, Torres and McLaughlin (2003) conclude that “The indigestion generated by tied sporting contests…seems, in an important way, to misunderstand the very purpose of the sporting contest” (p. 156, emphasis original). Therefore, they recognize that winning cannot always determine the better competitor; sometimes, an even score might be the best and most fair outcome.

Torres and McLaughlin’s analysis of ties demonstrates again that too much emphasis is often placed on winning. However, their analysis points to a specific solution to this problem—the recognition of ties as acceptable and worthwhile outcomes. This defense of ties can support the argument that victory does not necessarily determine the best athlete. Furthermore, it supports a wider variety of outcomes by emphasizing the importance of ties as legitimate ends to a contest.

The meaning of victory serves as one location for potential sport reformation, as outlined by a number of philosophers. The literature shows that while competitive sport is aimed at victory, winning takes on a number of meanings. The value associated with winning, or other outcomes and values (ties, playful attitudes, and merit), is crucial to understanding athletics. From a cultural standpoint, the meaning of victory is important because fanatical overvaluations of winning fixate on dichotomous understandings of winning and losing, ignoring the other values and outcomes associated with sporting contests.
Pursuit of Excellence

One of the hallmark values of sport is excellence. Athletics is a problem-solving, achievement-oriented domain, a place where exceptional ability can be demonstrated. In elite sport contexts, athletes strive for perfection, even though it will never be fully achieved. In one sense, excellence seems to be a noncontroversial, nonmoral value of sporting competition. However, a number of issues emerge from this focus on excellence, including questions concerning differing interpretations of excellence, whether mutual excellence is supported by competition, and whether or not excellence can be considered the highest good.

Some authors argue that in sport, athletes should value excellence, regardless of whether or not they win the game. In their view, the ends of a sport contest are achieving and demonstrating excellence, both in testing and contesting situations (Kretchmar, 1975a; Loland, 2002). Some contend that excellence in competition is mutual and that it involves a cooperative striving (e.g., Boxill, 2003; Simon, 2010). Finally, some authors note other important goals of sport that coincide with demonstrations of excellence, such as the performance of meaningful bodily actions or the achievement of aesthetically pleasing athletic feats (e.g., Kaelin, 1979; Metheny, 1965). Overall, the focus on excellence in sport comes from a desire to learn more about the abilities and skills of the athletes in question.
Excellences in Sport and Competition

By differentiating between tests and contests, Kretchmar highlights that excellence in sport can take on a number of forms. According to Kretchmar (1975a), tests are opposition by cut, where there is uncertainty regarding successes or failures (Kretchmar, 1975a, p. 23). Tests provide uncertainty because the performer “lives ambiguously toward his test, acting on the one hand as if his project were destined for success but knowing on the other that his gestures may be ineffectual” (Kretchmar, 1975a, p. 25). Because tests use opposition by cut, they provide a certain set of excellences. Though testing skills are often evaluated against another, this comparison is not required of a performer to determine what skills he or she possesses. As Kretchmar (1975a) puts it, “One need not lose a baking contest, for instance, to know that a badly burned pie was unsuccessfully baked” (p. 27).

Contests provide a second set of excellences. Kretchmar (1975a) claims that contesting follows opposition by scale or degree, where performers can execute certain skills but do so in an attempt to execute them better than the opposition. In other words, “They attempt to pass the same kind of test better, to a greater degree, higher on the scale, than another” (Kretchmar, 1975a, p. 28). Because of this, athletes can gain a different understanding of excellence than in testing. Contest participants learn about their skills in relation to another, the degree at which they achieve these skills, and whether they can perform them better or worse than opponents. Furthermore, certain skills are only important to contesting, such as holding onto the ball in basketball to keep a lead secure, that are not relevant to testing (it would be fairly useless to keep the ball in possession
when attending to tests of basketball skills). Therefore, Kretchmar’s analysis of tests and contests supports the notion that excellence is an important goal in sport. However, he demonstrates that different kinds of excellences can be found in different types of activities (tests and contests).

In his investigation of fair play and moral norms, Loland (2002) recognizes the importance of understanding the goal of sport, which he implies is excellence. For him, this “structural goal” of sport “deal[s] with the measuring of what can be called the relevant athletic performance” (Loland, 2002, p. 9). Importantly, this measurement takes place in the context of comparison—how well or poorly an athlete performs skills compared to a competitor. Loland’s philosophic discussion implicitly favors a form of excellence in competition—doing better than the opposition. Therefore, Loland, in his articulation of the goal of sport, supports the striving for excellence, albeit in the context of comparison.

Kretchmar and Loland’s discussion of excellence in competition and in achieving particular skills illustrates a potential avenue for solving issues in sport. By offering a specific value—excellence—as a high priority among competitors, they value the outcome of victory less than the achievement of excellence. Although their theories do ascribe certain types of excellence to winning, they also acknowledge that skill development and the successful completion of a test can provide other, equally valuable forms of excellence. Thus, reformed sport can reward excellences developed both in acquiring skills and in defeating opponents, demonstrating both testing and contesting excellences.
The Mutual Quest for Excellence

In his analysis of sport and ethics, Robert L. Simon (2010) regards competition “not as a zero-sum game but as a mutually acceptable quest for excellence through challenge” (p. 27). This conception of competition requires that opponents cooperate with one another to create a competitive challenge and that two (or more) athletes attempt to achieve excellence (and victory). Simon explicitly values excellence as the proper end of a sports contest. While one person or team will win, both can demonstrate competitive excellence. For Simon (2010), “Competitive sports provide a context in which we can stretch our bodily skills and capacities to the limits in the pursuit of excellence” (p. 37). Achieving excellence in athletics is a worthy goal that can be “sometimes inspiring…even ennobling as well” (Simon, 2010, p. 31). For Simon, sport is about questing for excellence—achieving goals and demonstrating skills. In other words, Simon argues that excellence should be sought by sport participants and that it is the capstone of other important characteristics.

In a similar vein, Jan Boxill (2003) characterizes good competitions as a focus on “a mutual challenge to achieve” (p. 109). Like Simon, Boxill articulates that the heart of competition involves both cooperation and a quest for excellence. She argues, “The emphasis is…on striving for excellence” (J. Boxill, 2003, p. 109). Additionally, Boxill believes that striving to achieve excellence plays a major role in the need to compete. She argues, “The process of competition emphasizes the struggle. It is the pursuit of excellence, the desire to become what one is capable of becoming” (J. Boxill, 2003, p. 111). Furthermore, Boxill (2003) sees the excellence developed in sport as “in itself
worthy of achievement” (p. 113). That is, in sport, one can develop specific excellences related to athletic skills and to “courage, perseverance, honesty, and cooperation” (J. Boxill, 2003, p. 113). Thus, in her defense of competition, Boxill contends that the most important aspect of athletics is striving towards excellence.

Simon and Boxill’s discussions of a mutual quest for excellence underline two important values—cooperation and striving for excellence. While both authors clearly advocate for the development of particular skills and for athletes to not only focus on playing well but also on doing better than their opponent, they also recognize that successful contests require a certain amount of cooperation. Therefore, Simon and Boxill might propose a greater emphasis on cooperation and the recognition of mutuality in contests to better conceive of high-quality sport competitions. Their exploration of a mutual quest for excellence recommends that sport reform begins, in part, with highlighting the importance of mutual striving in order to show that, while victory is important, sport that stresses cooperation allows for more durable, meaningful contests.

**Alternatives to Excellence**

Although some authors emphasize the importance of excellence, Eleanor Metheny (1965) recognizes that sport and bodily movements may have importance beyond this. For her, movement is a “symbolic form” which “may be described as a formulation of meaning” (Metheny, 1965, p. 72). In other words, movement has the power to convey meanings—both denotative and connotative. On one hand, movement can tell what a person is doing (i.e. “he is jumping”); it has “the power to name” (Metheny, 1965, p. 74).
On the other hand, movements have “subtle differences” and “we ‘read into’ the movement the meanings that these subtle differences convey to us” (Metheny, 1965, p. 74). Therefore, bodily movement explicitly describes what a person is doing (denotation) and also signifies certain underlying meanings not part of the definition (connotation). Importantly, sports provide connotative meaning. Athletes can participate in sport in order to “symbolize some more significant conception of man’s interaction with the universe of his existence” (Metheny, 1965, p. 39). Furthermore, Metheny (1965), in discussing the modern Olympic Games, suggests that these forms of competition “may well symbolize man’s concept of himself as a consequential force within the grand design of the universe, as well as each man’s conception of his own ability to perform those functions that identify him as a man among men” (p. 42). Metheny’s analysis of connotation and denotation in sport suggests that success in sport is more than achieving excellence in a certain skill set. Instead, athletes should seek to express themselves and symbolize their concept of self.

Eugene Kaelin (1979) also appeals to characteristics other than excellence, offering an analysis of sport that offers an analysis of sport that centers on aesthetics. For Kaelin (1979), a “well-played game” is one that strives for aesthetic pleasure as the primary good of competition. He therefore claims that wins and losses are irrelevant and ties provide no challenge to the validity of the contest. Despite the fact that Kaelin (1979) argues that winning and losing are not relevant to the aesthetic content of the game, he recognizes that “the desire to win is never aesthetically irrelevant” (p. 328). In other words, Kaelin argues that striving to win is important for achieving aesthetic appeal. Furthermore, Kaelin calls for more risks and less focus on winning in order to achieve
these “well-played games.” For him, the good sports contest relies on criteria that make it aesthetically pleasing (for example, drama), rather than focusing all energies on winning. He concludes, “Give us more coaches who are willing to put their jobs and reputations on the line by going for the well-played game. Let us at least try to go out and win one for the Gipper, who has become in spite of the legend a symbol of the aesthetically dissatisfied sports fan” (Kaelin, 1979, p. 331). Kaelin believes that sport is about more than winning—it is about the aesthetics of a well-played game.

Metheny and Kaelin demonstrate that the highest value in sport need not necessarily be excellence. They provide alternatives—searching for personal meaning and producing aesthetic performances—as ways to find success in sport. For Metheny and Kaelin, these values better represent what sport is about. Therefore, their work provides a guide toward some reforms, namely, that sport might be better focused on achieving meaning or aesthetic value. Their arguments signal a potential area for reform by demonstrating that excellence and winning may not necessarily be the only goals of a sport contest.

Scholarship on excellence in sport demonstrates that, for many, exceptionalism in achievement provides an important non-zero sum value. Passing tests well and showing superiority over other test takers often demonstrates this excellence. Therefore, excellence convincingly plays an important role in sport. Striving for superior performances fits within contemporary American culture. Although many sport philosophers have shown that excellence plays a meaningful role in sport, it raises questions about other, alternate values present in sport. In a reformed sport, non-zero sum values, beyond excellence, may have both metaphysical and cultural significance.
**Relationships with Opponents**

In athletic contests, some competitors see their opponents as enemies or hindrances, others as necessary facilitators, and still others as friends in a common project. Some sport philosophers specifically argue that opponents should not be seen as mere obstacles (e.g., Fraleigh, 1984). Still others demonstrate the ultimate outcome and goal of competitions should be friendship (e.g., Hyland, 1978, 1985). Others see cooperation and mutual affirmation as a potential relationship among competitors (e.g., Kretchmar, 1975b).

In addition to looking at the competitor-opponent relationship, other sport philosophy literature focuses on sportsmanship. These authors address specifically how athletes should treat one another (e.g., Arnold, 1984; Feezell, 1986; Keating, 2007; Sessions, 2004). Furthermore, some authors address the issue of running up the score and its effect on opponents (Dixon, 1992, 1998; Feezell, 1999; Hardman, Fox, McLauglin, & Zimmerman, 1996).

**Opponents as Facilitators**

Warren Fraleigh discusses the problems with seeing opponents as mere obstacles, rather than as cooperative facilitators. He claims that the issue originates from a stance that competition is a way to get something from the other, therefore seeing one’s opponent as an obstacle to overcome where “one must eliminate the other by conquest” (Fraleigh, 1984, p. 84). On the other hand, when athletes see opponents as facilitators, they recognize that competition requires mutual cooperation where “[t]he hindrance
provided by opponents is a hindrance for mutual expression” (Fraleigh, 1984, p. 84).

When one sees an opponent as a facilitator, “[w]inning means winning the contest—that produced by all—not defeating an opponent” (Fraleigh, 1984, p. 85).

Treating opponents as facilitators provides benefits for both parties in sport. Fraleigh (1984) notes that feelings toward the other are positive when seeing the opponent as a “cooperative agent” (p. 89). Furthermore, this mutual cooperation does not prevent both parties from attaining certain levels of excellence. Participants in mutual contests also can find what Fraleigh (1984) calls “sweet tension” with high quality responses by opponents to the moves made by the player. In other words, sweet tension results from two well-matched teams or players regarding each other as facilitating the competition (p. 91). Finally, and perhaps most importantly, Fraleigh contends that seeing opponents as facilitators makes the sport contest “a human event wherein the mutual respect and regard of opponents is evident” (Fraleigh, 1984, p. 91). In other words, seeing opponents as facilitators creates a mutual respect between competitors.

Fraleigh’s criticism of seeing opponents as enemies helps to show one area where problems in sport arise. If competitors do not see their opposition as human, they objectify them and may treat them with contempt. In an effort to combat this, Fraleigh recommends treating opponents with respect and seeing them as more than mere obstacles. Thus, he might suggest that athletic competitions would benefit from better relationships between opponents, where they recognize the necessity and importance of having another person to facilitate the contest. Furthermore, opponents can play two different facilitator roles. First, in some sports (such as basketball and soccer), opponents facilitate the actual test—without an opponent the game of basketball cannot exist. In
other cases, (such as bowling and golf) opponents facilitate the contest—they provide a measure of superiority by attempting to take the same test. These distinctions further highlight the necessity of seeing opponents as facilitators rather than mere obstacles.

**Competition, Friendship and Cooperation**

Despite the fact that opponents are often seen as enemies and obstacles to overcome, some argue that they play a more significant role. Hyland, in a series of articles, disagrees with this notion. In “Competition and Friendship,” he argues that alienation is not the necessary end to competition (Hyland, 1978). Although some people believe that they play harder when they play against an “enemy” and that anger can enhance competitive attitudes, leading to the attitude that “competition causes alienation,” Hyland (1978) contends that friendship is just as likely an outcome as alienation (p. 27).

To better describe how competition can lead to both alienation and friendship, Hyland refers to two competing theories about the person: (1) monadic and (2) relational. Monadic individuals are autonomous and follow in the traditions of Henry David Thoreau’s self-reliant individual, Friederich Nietzsche’s übermensch, and Adam Smith’s description of capitalism and wealth. On the other hand, others subscribe to relational attitudes, where individuals define themselves by their relationships with others (e.g. father, daughter, spouse). This is consistent with Aristotle’s “political animal,” Marx’s “species being,” and Martin Buber’s I-thou relationship. These two different, and often opposing, conceptions of human nature lead to a logical conclusion about competition.
Hyland (1978) claims, “[n]atural competition and alienation seem grounded in a conception of the individual as monadic, natural friendship in the individual as relational, and these two conceptions seem themselves in fundamental opposition” (p. 31). In other words, Hyland suggests that monadic descriptions of competitors will more likely result in alienation, while descriptions of competitors as relational more likely result in friendship.

Hyland is not convinced that alienation and friendship must be in opposition with one another. Hyland reconciles these to viewpoints using an analysis of Socratic eros and an analysis of the Hegelian dialectic. Hyland (1978) argues that human beings are erotic (in the Socratic sense), where eros individualizes them but leaves these being incomplete, and therefore relational (pp. 31–32). This demonstrates that the monadic and relational ideals of human nature are not irreconcilable (Hyland, 1978, p. 32). The athlete needs a competitor to be complete.

Furthermore, Hyland (1985) argues sport, “as an activity of finite spirits,” should be considered dialectic (in a Hegelian sense) (p. 65). Dialectic movements, negate, lift up, and preserve (Hyland, 1985, p. 65). Sport fits Hegel’s definition of the dialectic because “In order for me to accomplish the goal of winning the game, I must negate the efforts of the other player or team to win” (Hyland, 1985, p. 65). Negating the other team in sport is not met passively; the other team attempts to quell this negation. Therefore, violence and alienation may become a part of the sport experience as part of this negation in the dialectic of sport (Hyland, 1985, p. 66). However, it is not necessary that negation results in alienation and violence. According to Hyland (1985), “Both aggression and friendship are revealed as ontological possibilities of the dialectical moment of negation” (p. 66).
Hyland (1985) concludes, based on his analysis of competition in Socratic and Hegelian terms, that alienation comes from a defective form of competition (p. 66). Therefore, the ideal result of competition should be friendship, not alienation.

Kretchmar’s analysis of competition aligns with Hyland’s conception of completion and friendship. Kretchmar (1975b) claims that Martin Buber’s conception of the “I-Thou” relationship provides a foundation for interactions between opponents in sport (p. 20). He defines this “I-Thou” relationship as one “characterized by honesty” free from “calculation about how one would like to appear” (Kretchmar, 1975b, p. 19).

Additionally, Kretchmar (1975b) argues that Buber’s I-Thou relationship does not require extreme cooperation; rather, it allows a person to maintain his or her unique perspective while “venturing out ‘toward the other’” (p. 21). For Kretchmar, competition can help opponents find something shared. He states, “Frequently a kind of fraternity among opponents in a single sport develops. A common ‘adversary’ is identified as the conditions of the test and not only as fellow athletes…A problem is shared” (Kretchmar, 1975b, p. 23). In other words, sport is not so much about athletes overcoming one another, but about them overcoming a shared test. Therefore, Kretchmar (1975b) concludes that sport can be counted as successful, in Buber’s terms, when it “promise[s] human affirmation…The human capacity to give to and receive another human being may be well exercised” (p. 27).

Both Hyland and Kretchmar emphasize the importance of the other in sport. They recognize that opponents are not necessarily enemies. Rather, opponents can be friends who share the competitive experience of sport. In order for a good contest to occur, competitors must demonstrate some sort of sharing and cooperation in order to achieve a
good contest. Hyland and Kretchmar’s sentiments show that sport can be possibly conceived in a way that promotes friendship and cooperation. If these are emphasized, then sport can be better for all.

**Sportsmanship and Respect for Opponents**

Other sport philosophers analyze relationships with opponents, often under the heading of sportsmanship. This section will look at these accounts from perspectives of teleology (Keating, 2007), deontology (Arnold, 1984), and virtue ethics (Feezell, 1986; Sessions, 2004).

James W. Keating’s account of sportsmanship looks at athletics and sport as two separate types of activities. According to Keating (2007), sports are endeavors designed to afford pleasure to oneself and one’s competitors. On the other hand, athletics are competitions where the main goal is “exclusive possession” and the accurate determination of winners and losers as well as displays of excellence are the most important outcomes. Therefore, Keating’s (2007) maxim of sportsmanship involves a utilitarian calculus, namely “always conduct yourself in such a manner that you will increase rather than detract from the pleasure to be found in the activity, both your own and that of your fellow participants” (p. 146). In other words, good sportspeople should be magnanimous and generous. By way of contrast, in athletics, good sportspeople should conduct themselves in a way that conveys the seriousness of the contest, while also displaying fairness, generosity in winning, and graciousness in defeat. Thus, sport and athletics have two separate ends and two different means of achieving that ends.
Because Keating is a utilitarian, he argues that the ends justify the means. Therefore, the different ends of sport and athletics require different prescriptions for sportsmanship in these two different cases. His teleological perspective allows for the greatest good for the most people and his attitudes toward sportsmanship reflect this.

Though Keating highlights generosity and fairness as key components of sportsmanship (in sport, but not necessarily in athletics), Peter J. Arnold (1984) argues that fairness, “can only be regarded as a necessary condition of sportsmanship, but by no means a sufficient one” (p. 62). To delineate his conception of sportsmanship, Arnold (1984) describes sportsmanship in three ways—as a social union, as a “means to the promotion of pleasure,” and as a “form of altruism”—ultimately concluding that the best definition of sportsmanship requires altruism (p. 61). For Arnold, sportsmanship as a social union is a commitment to the social values associated with a sport. He states that the social union view of sportsmanship “sees acts of sportsmanship as chiefly having to do with maintaining the best traditions of sport as a valued and shared form of life” (Arnold, 1984, p. 63). Arnold’s second conception of sportsmanship focuses on the promotion of pleasure. Here, he follows Keating’s definition of sportsmanship as that which increases the pleasure of a sporting activity both for the self and for the other (Arnold, 1984, pp. 64–65). However, Arnold sees Keating’s definition as meeting only the minimal moral requirements of sportsmanship and dismisses it as the best description, though Arnold does note that it is beneficial in emphasizing the play spirit and generosity (Arnold, 1984, pp. 65–66).

Finally, Arnold describes sportsmanship as an opportunity for promoting altruism. Altruistic behaviors are those which are praiseworthy but not obligatory (Arnold, 1984, p.
Those who act altruistically genuinely care for the well-being of the other, and in the case of sportsmanship, that of their competitors (Arnold, 1984, p. 68). Accordingly, Arnold (1984) claims, “[w]hen acts in sport go beyond that which is expected of players generally and are done only out of concern for another’s good and for no other reason, they are not only altruistic, but exemplify the best traditions of sportsmanship” (p. 69). In other words, Arnold takes on a deontological perspective and believes that sportsmanship at its best is altruistic and concerned for the welfare of others.

In contrast to Keating’s utilitarianism and Arnold’s deontology, Feezell’s virtue ethics offer a view of sportsmanship that embraces an Aristotelian mean between the extremes of seriousness and playfulness. His focus centers on the virtue of sportsmanship and also offers a direct critique of Keating’s position. For example, Feezell (1986) contends that differentiating sport and athletics, where sport is a playful activity and athletics are serious, competitive activities, is problematic because it can be difficult, in human experiences, to determine the differences between the two activities (p. 6). In other words, those that participate in sports are “simultaneously player and athlete” (Feezell, 1986, p. 6). Furthermore, the generalizations Keating makes about sport and athletics are not rooted in phenomenology or human experience.

Therefore, Feezell’s (1986) definition of sportsmanship indicates a vision of virtue that pictures this characteristic between the two extremes of “excessive playfulness” and “excessive seriousness” (p. 10). Thus, problems with sportsmanship arise when one takes a game too seriously and overemphasizes victory and when an athlete mistakenly commits himself solely to winning and misunderstands the necessary lightness involved in participating in sport. Therefore, for Feezell (1986), “the good sport
doesn’t cheat, attempt to hurt the opponent, or taunt another. A certain lightness of spirit prohibits uncivil displays of temper” (p. 11). Although, at times, players can fail to take games seriously, more often, problems in athletics seem to stem from excessive focus on winning and victory. Hence, for Feezell, the play spirit can mitigate undesirable behaviors in sport.

In a similar vein, William Lad Sessions’ (2004) discussion of sportsmanship centers on virtue. For him, sportsmanship can be defined as “personal honor.” He notes that the “usual suspects” in sportsmanship literature—such as fair play, “respect for the game,” personal integrity, promotion of equality, and applied ethics—do not sufficiently describe sportsmanship (Sessions, 2004, pp. 49–50). For Sessions, good sportsmanship is that which relies on, specifically, personal honor. Those with personal honor are dedicated and committed to codes within a community. So, in the specific case of sport, personal honor refers to a commitment to the traditions, history, practices, and general community of that sport (Sessions, 2004, pp. 51–53). Therefore, sportsmanship is not a dedication or respect for the abstract “game” but “a deep desire to belong as a fully equal member to an honorable group whose behavior and very identity center on that sport” (Sessions, 2004, p. 54). Honoring the traditions and history of a sport community does not preclude the good sportsperson from practicing fairness and generosity. However, sportsmanship as honor does not rely solely on these virtues. Instead, it depends on the relationship to the community the sport has built.

Despite the fact that teleological, deontological, and virtue ethics provide different conceptions of sportsmanship, Keating, Arnold, Feezell, and Sessions illustrate the need to take this concept into account when thinking about the treatment of opponents. An
understanding of sportsmanship is required for an analysis of interpersonal relationships in athletics. Different philosophies provide different prescriptions for sportsmanship, but all hold the same underlying belief—that the treatment of opponents is central to the ethics of sport. Based on the analyses of Keating, Arnold, Feezell, and Sessions, a recommendation that sportsmanship ought to be seriously considered in reforming athletic competitions is warranted.

**Running up the Score**

One example of the treatment of opponents in sport comes from the philosophic discussion on wide margins of victory, or in popular parlance, “running up the score.” On one side of the argument is Nicholas Dixon (1992), who argues against what he calls the “anti-blowout thesis” (p. 1). He opposes claims that “It is intrinsically unsporting for players or teams to maximize the margin of victory after they have secured victory in a one-sided contest” (Dixon, 1992, p. 1). Dixon sees this position as common among the sporting community, where most people feel it is ruthless and classless to pursue wide-margin victories. However, Dixon rejects the position based on what he claims are two mistaken beliefs: (1) that winning is the only thing that matters and (2) that it is cruel and humiliating to run up the score. First, because winning is not the most important part of sport, it cannot inflict strong humiliation or cause players to be “diminished as human beings” (Dixon, 1992, p. 3). Moreover, Dixon argues that even though players may feel humiliated, their reactions are not the result of actual “strong humiliation.” In fact, because they do not face true strong humiliation, “the existence of such feelings does not
justify moral condemnation of teams pursuing victory by a wide margin” (Dixon, 1992, p. 5). Dixon recognizes that taunting and the like can be humiliating, but the act of pursuing a lopsided victory is not inherently problematic. He concludes that the “intuition” that lopsided victories are unsporting “is no more than a prejudice” (Dixon, 1992, p. 11).

In opposition to Dixon, Hardman et al. defend the anti-blowout thesis. They argue that, contrary to Dixon’s claims, “running up the score can inflict serious harm on the loser…because our culture makes a strong and justifiable connection between equality and self-esteem” (Hardman et al., 1996, p. 65). Hardman, et al. (1996) claim that winning possesses more importance than Dixon claims, and that because winning holds such importance, it is closely tied to self-esteem. Therefore, losing is humiliating and lowers the loser’s self-esteem. They conclude that Dixon is wrong to undervalue the importance of winning and that this overemphasis is not a problem of sport per se, but one of wider society. Hardman, et al. (1996) uphold the anti-blowout thesis because it accurately identifies the importance of victory in American culture and demonstrates that losing by a wide margin causes actual harm to the loser.

Dixon responds to Hardman et al.’s criticism by reiterating his argument that losing players should not feel strong humiliation because they lost by a wide margin. He grants that they could feel strong humiliation for other factors—such as inadequate preparation and an “embarrassing lack of skill”—but that the score alone does not create this humiliation (Dixon, 1998, p. 62). Dixon (1998) claims, “Strong humiliation, when it occurs, results from the quality of play of the losing player or team, not from the margin of its defeat” (p. 63). Additionally, Dixon (1998) maintains that “heavy defeats are not in
themselves any cause for shame and disgrace” (p. 70). Instead, Dixon (1998) attaches shame to a failure of character, arguing, “the heavy defeat is only a symptom of the real source of shame and disgrace: self-regarding character flaws or gross incompetence” (p. 70). Therefore, Dixon concludes that winning by a wide margin is not morally unacceptable nor a harmful way to treat opponents.

According to Feezell, Dixon’s arguments also fall short. He argues that there are good reasons for running up the score to be considered unsporting. Additionally, Feezell (1999) contends that Dixon’s anti-blowout thesis is too absolute and defines his own “Revised Anti-Blowout thesis,” as: “It is prima facie unsporting for players or teams to maximize the margin of victory after they have secured victory in a one-sided contest” (p. 71). Feezell sees his “Revised Anti-Blowout thesis” as defensible. First, it is advisable to avoid running up the score because it violates respect for one’s opponents. Furthermore, maximizing the margin of victory also undermines competition and breaches respect for the game—both its central rules and the traditions and customs of the sport. Feezell (1999) also distinguishes two types of “easing up,” between decreasing effort and not employing strategies meant to run up the score (p. 73). So, for Feezell (1999), “it is appropriate to ease up in the strategic sense, not in the sense of effort” (p. 73). Feezell concludes that running up the score usually does constitute unsporting behavior.

Dixon, Hardman and associates, and Feezell engage in an important debate concerning lopsided victories. While their arguments vary, the understanding that opponents deserve respect underlies each of their arguments. Thus, discussions of running up the score not only help to determine how a competitor should treat his or her opponents, but can provide a possible avenue for transforming sport. Dixon, Hardman
and associates, and Feezell might contend that some of the problems in contemporary
sport stem from a poor treatment of the opposition. Therefore, they may point to issues of
respect as potential areas to enrich and ethically improve the sporting experience.

In terms of sport reform, relationships with opponents play a key role. As the
literature suggests, athletics require opponents in order for a contest to occur. Although
they are often seen as enemies, good opponents not only facilitate the contest, but may
also develop into friends. Moving away from seeing opponents as obstacles and enemies
stands as an area for reform, backed by the scholarship of sport philosophers. It is
important for the sporting experience that opponents are seen as human others who are
valuable as people.

**Relationships with Teammates**

In the field of the philosophy of sport, little work has been done analyzing the
relationships between and among teammates. Perhaps these relationships are taken for
granted and assumed to be healthy because teamwork leads to success. However, such
assumptions are dangerous and this is supported by the literature. Some scholarship
focuses broadly on the effects of excessive individualism (e.g., Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan,
Swidler, & Tipton, 2008) while others look at individualism specifically in sport (e.g.,
Kretchmar, 2007). Additionally, the psychological dimensions of sport provided by some
scholars (e.g., Larson & LaFasto, 1989; Shogan, 1999) can shed light on important
characteristics needed for good teamwork.
Critiques of American Individualism

Robert Bellah and his colleagues (2008) analyze the problems of individualism in American culture. Their sociological study uses interviews with numerous members of American society to draw conclusions about the state of culture in the United States. Bellah, et al. (2008) contend that individualism underlines many of the problems plaguing contemporary society. They state, “Individualism lies at the very core of American culture […] Anything that would violate our right to think for ourselves, judge for ourselves, make our own decisions, live our lives as we see fit, is not only morally wrong, it is sacrilegious” (Bellah et al., 2008, p. 142). Furthermore, American individualism values self-reliance and independence as values in and of themselves (Bellah et al., 2008, p. xiv). Although self-reliance and independence are not necessarily bad characteristics to possess, the crux of individualism lies at the exaltation of strength and toughness while fearing weakness and softness. Moreover, individualism becomes problematic when “It adulates winners while showing contempt for losers, a contempt that can descend with crushing weight on those considered, either by others or by themselves, to be moral or social failures” (Bellah et al., 2008, p. xiv).

This type of individualism is linked to a growing number of problems in society. Bellah and his colleagues argue that excessive individualism leads to a decline in civic membership and forgetting the interconnectedness among community members (Bellah et al., 2008, pp. xv, xviii). This leads people to lose their “sense of obligation to the rest of society” and for the elite to adopt a “predatory attitude toward the rest of society, its willingness to pursue its own interests without regard to anyone else” (Bellah et al., 2008,
p. xviii). For these sociologists, many Americans are willing to sacrifice their community membership in order to achieve individual success (particularly economically). This represents a failure of American society to recognize the importance of interrelatedness and ties to others. Furthermore, this lack of understanding contributes to a wide range of issues, including vast income inequality (Bellah et al., 2008, p. xxxiv). In other words, Bellah and his colleagues contend that individualism lies at the heart of economic and moral problems in the United States. A lack of a solid community with strong ties leads individuals to think of themselves above all others and value the characteristics (such as toughness and independence) that allow one to thrive in an individualistic society. Instead, Bellah, et al. (2008) recommend that a better society realizes the importance of its interconnectedness and works to improve the lives of all its members.

In terms of sport, anti-individualism can be found in Kretchmar’s (2007) “modified purist” approach to basketball that highlights the “tightly interactive relationships” between teammates and opponents (p. 36). According to Kretchmar (2007), basketball conceived in a way that emphasizes the importance of all ten players on the court “offers a richer and more durable test” than a game that focuses on the performance of individual athletes (pp. 36–37). Essentially, he critiques the individualistic approach to basketball where players are rewarded for executing moves that focus more their individual talents rather than contributing to team play. Kretchmar (2007) uses McIntyre’s conception of practices to argue that “The good life is grounded in meeting complex challenges with integrity and excellence, in building coherent stories around our repeated encounters with practices—as parents, basketball players, or professors” (p. 42). Furthermore, individual actions do not help one attain this good life.
Kretchmar (2007) states, “Isolated feats, or skills, or displays, as remarkable and breathtaking as they sometimes are, function far less effectively in doing this job” (p. 42). Kretchmar concludes that teamwork produces a better game for all and that players should strive not to master individual feats but to work together well as a team.

Although Bellah and his associates do not openly articulate ideas about sport, their criticism of American individualism could be easily applied to athletics. Many contemporary athletes focus mainly on their own personal success rather than sharing victory and defeat with teammates. In turn, these individualistic attitudes influence an athlete’s relationship with his or her opponents and teammates. Therefore, Bellah, et al. may suggest that an anti-individualist viewpoint may help to create better sport that allows for more respect and greater responsibility towards others. Furthermore, Kretchmar’s “modified purist” approach to basketball enhances the anti-individualist approach to sport by highlighting that a game with a strong sense of teamwork and unity can be better than one that focuses on the skills of individual players.

**Psychological Dimensions of Teamwork**

Debra Shogan (1999) highlights some of the psychological aspects of teamwork needed to become a successful athlete. She notes that little philosophic literature discusses the matter of teamwork in ethical conflict. Therefore, she argues that ethical conflicts arise when teamwork excludes some from communication and trust but not others (Shogan, 1999, p. 81). Moreover, Shogan (1999) believes that communication among teammates and coaches is limited “when some athletes or coaches are unable to
trust that they will not be dismissed from a team or otherwise harmed if some aspect of what is important to them is openly disclosed” (p. 81). Though Shogan particularly focuses on gay and lesbian athletes, the principle that open lines of communication must be available to all can be applied to a number of team situations. Shogan (1999) concludes that trust and open communication are important aspects of teamwork that must be present for a successful team and elite athletes to thrive.

Larson and LaFasto (1989) suggest that certain aspects of teamwork are necessary for successful teams to operate. For example, they argue that unity is an important aspect of good teamwork. They state, “The most important thing about team identity is not that it’s the right one, or the best one, or the most appropriate one, but that whatever the identity is, it unifies” (Larson & LaFasto, 1989, p. 76). Furthermore, in addition to possessing the necessary skills for the sport, teammates must be “able to collaborate effectively with one another” (Larson & LaFasto, 1989, p. 84). Because collaboration is so important to teamwork, they agree with Shogan that trust plays an important role. For Larson and LaFasto (1989), honesty, openness, consistency, and respect are the four key elements to trust in teamwork (p. 85). Therefore, Larson and LaFasto’s conception of teamwork relies on a unified identity, collaboration, and trust.

Shogan and Larson and LaFasto’s analyses point out that teamwork is an important aspect of sport. Furthermore, they describe trust and communication as key parts of maintaining good relationships between teammates. Their work suggests that interpersonal relationships are important to creating a respectful atmosphere in sport. Therefore, these psychological aspects are a necessary component of sport reform, in that teamwork must be a part of re-conceptualizing interpersonal relationships in sport.
Relationships with teammates are an important element of sport reform, as noted by the literature concerning American individualism and teamwork. Some of the greatest potential benefits of team sports come from the community bonds formed through teamwork and shared experiences. Attempting to test and contest well together helps to create solid friendships. Reformed sport can draw from these community bonds, teamwork, and teammate relationships in order to create better sport.

Conclusion

Writing about reforming sport and transforming it for the better is not new. Many sport philosophers have focused specifically on certain behaviors, characteristics, and values in athletics and criticized them or offered them as potential solutions. Concerning the meaning of victory, some have noticed the problems associated with an overemphasis on winning (Feezell, 2004; Fraleigh, 1984; Hyland, 1990). Others have criticized winning as a poor indicator of skill (Carr, 1999; Dixon, 1999). Furthermore, some contend that competition is better seen as play (de Koven, 1978; Feezell, 2004; Hurka, 2005; Suits, 2005). Additionally, some scholars identify problems with seeing competition as a dichotomy between winning and losing (Herrigel, 1999; Richardson, 2012) while others determine that ties are acceptable, and perhaps desirable, outcomes (Torres & McLaughlin, 2003).

Moreover, some sport philosophers determine excellence as an important virtue associated with sport that emphasizes both skill development and winning (Kretchmar, 1975a; Loland, 2002). Excellence also provides an opportunity for cooperation, as it can
be conceived as a mutual quest (J. Boxill, 2003; Simon, 2010). Although many philosophers see excellence as an important value, others describe the expression of meaning and aesthetics as other, equally important, values in athletics (Kaelin, 1979; Metheny, 1965).

Interpersonal relationships also play an important role in thinking about sport and potential areas for reform. Opponents are often seen as mere obstacles to overcome in order to win. However, some argue that it is better to see opponents as facilitators both for the test and the contest (Fraleigh, 1984). Additionally, cooperation and friendship are key elements in dealing with opponents (Hyland, 1978, 1985; Kretchmar, 1975b). Sportsmanship and respect for opponents also reflect on how athletes should treat their counterparts. Good sportsmanship signals an underlying respect for opponents, despite differing descriptions of the concept (Arnold, 1984; Feezell, 1986; Keating, 2007; Sessions, 2004). Pursuing victory by a large margin provides a test case for respect for opponents, with valid argument both for and against running up the score (Dixon, 1992, 1998; Feezell, 1999; Hardman et al., 1996). Analyzing running up the score also signals and underlying respect for opponents.

In addition to concerns about treatment of opponents, respect for teammates is also an important aspect of interpersonal relationships in sport. Some scholars note that excessive individualism impacts the community and group aspect of sport (Bellah et al., 2008; Kretchmar, 2007). Because of this, they espouse anti-individualist ideals. Furthermore, psychological components of teamwork are important in understanding relationships between teammates. Elements, such as trust, communication, and unity, are necessary for teams to flourish (Larson & LaFasto, 1989; Shogan, 1999).
On their own, each of these four areas can help to reform sport. They represent certain points where sport can change for the better. Each offers insight into reconceptualizing sport to transform it for the benefit of all athletes. These four areas all provide useful clues for specific sport reforms and my proposals for both gender-neutral and gender-sensitive reforms will draw from some of the works reviewed in this chapter.
Chapter 4

Justifications for Reform in College Sport

Many feminists and other social reformers have attempted to level the playing field for women in sport and other domains. Citing a variety of discriminatory practices, they have argued persuasively that women deserve equal access to a number of society’s institutions and leadership positions. Liberal feminist efforts to secure voting rights, political representation, and access to education stand as notable steps towards equity. Prime goals of feminist activism have included seeking legal, political, economic, and cultural equality. In terms of athletics, the application of Title IX to intercollegiate and interscholastic sports, the acceptance of women’s professional leagues such as the Women’s National Basketball Association (WNBA), and the emergence of women in athletic leadership positions, highlight the fight for women’s equality and underscore the fact that women are willing and able, according to most feminists, to meet the challenges of elite athletics, if given the opportunity.

However, efforts to gain greater access to institutions, such as intercollegiate sport, imply at least a tacit endorsement of their values. It would make little sense to seek parity, after all, in domains that promise no rewards. Yet, these institutions arguably have been corrupted over time and, because of this, carry only mixed benefits. For example, the United States’ government often operates through strident partisan politics, gives undue consideration to the views of corporate lobbyists in making laws and executing them, and, historically, has practiced discrimination on many fronts. Nevertheless,
women fight for the right to participate in this very process. Similarly, women wish to enter into a collegiate sportsworld, that is, in many ways, morally bankrupt. Although sport has many redeeming features, repeated scandals involving cheating and recruiting, excessive violations of NCAA rules, cover-ups of criminal behavior, and charges of educational dishonesty call into question the moral status of current athletic practices, particularly at the Division I level. Because of this, one might question the fight for admission to, and efforts to gain equality in, a broken system.

These twin realities—women’s rights to equal access and the checkered reputations of the very institutions to which access is sought—create a tension between two different feminist strategies: pursuing access and seeking reform. Radical feminists aim at challenging the hegemonic masculinity promoted in sport by “adopt[ing] an unequivocal women-centered perspective that recognizes and celebrates differences among women and at the same time seriously questions male-dominated and male-defined sport” (Hall, 1996, p. 91). In many ways, radical feminists believe that attempts to enter into morally compromised institutions are misguided. They question the pursuit of inclusion and focus on changing a system that gives undue importance to, and perpetuates, hegemonic masculinity and its associated traits.

On the other hand, many liberal feminists seek access to the existing sport system. They fight “to provide girls and women the same opportunities and resources as boys and men, and to remove the barriers and constraints to their participation” (Hall, 1996, p. 91). Additionally, Hall notes that liberal feminists often “do not always see as problematic the fundamental nature of male-defined sport with its emphasis on hierarchy,
competitiveness, and aggression” (Hall, 1996, p. 91). In other words, liberal feminists center their activism on achieving equality within the current system rather than attempting to challenge the institution.

To date, efforts of feminist activism in sport have centered on liberal strategies—that is, on approaches aimed at equity rather than radical efforts toward reform (Hall, pp. 89-90). There are good reasons for this strategy. Numerous benefits accrue to those who secure rights of participation, the problems of sport and other social institutions notwithstanding. Furthermore, reform efforts may rest on antecedent access. If women do not have a place in powerful institutions, their attempts to make changes may never be heard. Access therefore may be a necessary precondition for making substantive changes.

The values of liberal and radical feminism are different in degree rather than kind. All feminists seek to challenge the norms of a society where equal rights for women do not exist. Because access and reform share an underlying purpose of enhancing the lives of women, both methods for achieving success merit attention. However, as noted, their differences cause a tension. Strong efforts in the direction of access may imply that reform is unnecessary or unimportant—after all, why would women pursue club membership if it were not already valuable? Conversely, efforts in the direction of reform can impede progress on access—why would club members invite outspoken critics to join the club? This dynamic must be carefully navigated for feminist projects to succeed.

In the domain of athletics, feminist philosopher Leslie P. Francis (1993) describes this tension as a “paradox” (p. 33). She questions the merits of seeking equal participation in the current, corrupted system. Francis even goes as far as to say that fighting for
equality within this morally indefensible institution undermines any attempts to remodel sport. She notes that “Title IX […] does not propose such radical changes and may even in some contexts be a roadblock to them” (Francis, 1993, p. 44). In some ways, according to Francis, the fight for equal access has taken the focus from, and thus too impeded, much-needed reform.

Despite the fact that Francis openly questions the fight for equal access, she still recognizes the necessity of the struggle for equality as long as society continues to sanction sport as is. However, she puts more emphasis on reform than increasing access, arguing that “there is a stronger case to be made for radical changes in the current practice” (Francis, 1993, p. 44). Instead of seeking equal opportunity for all, she believes feminists should focus on transforming sport so that it is inclusive, equitable, fair, and morally sound.

Despite Francis’ argument for promoting reform over equal access, I argue that an equal emphasis on reform and access maintains a useful balance in current feminist agendas. Thus, I suggest that feminist sport scholars and activists should consider a two-pronged approach, focusing both on fighting for equality and, at the same time, reforming sport. Without the opportunity to participate in sport, women and feminists cannot pursue warranted changes. And, feminists challenging the institution of sport itself must understand both the importance of access to gain reform and the symbolism associated with equality. I recognize that navigating the tension between these positions poses both strategic and political difficulties. Nevertheless, I argue that feminists must face these
challenges in order to create better sporting opportunities for women and potentially for men too.

I argue that necessary reform efforts can represent changes to athletics that focus on wide-reaching practices impacting everyone. These reforms recognize that an excessive focus on winning and the forces of hegemonic masculinity have harmed both women and men, and thus focus on making sport better for all. Chapters 5 will provide in-depth descriptions and analyses of these reforms.

The present chapter will focus on justifying the need for these reforms. In the first section, I analyze the myriad problems in college sport identified by a number of scholars. Then, I will justify the need for gender-sensitive reforms by outlining the philosophy of feminist sport scholars. This focuses on the utility of women’s experiences and perspectives for effectively reforming sport—and specifically for making it a better, more accepting place for women and girls.

The Need for Reform in College Sport

The case for equality in college sport is a strong one, but so is the case for reform. Francis is not the only scholar to recognize this. Her arguments inform, and are informed by, some of the most significant and compelling critics of intercollegiate sport, Peter A. French, John R. Thelin, and Michael Oriard. These scholars question the assumption that college sport is inherently, and thus too, in practice, morally defensible. While these scholars recognize the redeeming features of sport, they also suggest that a number of problems arise when athletic departments focus excessively on winning and
commercial viability. Like Francis, these scholars highlight the necessity of reform in college athletics.

French, in *Ethics and College Sports: Ethics, Sports, and the University*, criticizes American intercollegiate sport and questions the morality of the practice itself. While French (2004) acknowledges a number of moral benefits associated with college sport, he questions whether or not they “require the administrative structure, the facilities, and the trappings that are involved, [in sport, but], especially […in] football and men’s basketball” (p. 3). In order to be morally justifiable, athletics must measure up to the universities’ mission statements and charters, something they have clearly failed to do (French, 2004, p. 6). French identifies what he calls a series of “myths” that mask the unsavory realities of college sport. They include amateurism, character education, gender equity, and economics (French, 2004, p. 2). Universities, administrators, and coaches justify the role of sport on campus and defend its morality by employing these myths. However, French argues that the facts of the case expose the myths for what they are.

College sports, particularly in large Division I institutions, cannot be justified on grounds of amateurism, character education, and gender equity, or claims about providing financial support to their institutions. Instead, intercollegiate sports are a form of entertainment.

In describing the first myth, French argues that colleges and the NCAA act hypocritically when they say that college athletes are amateurs. If athletes should play for the “love of the game” and the internal goods of sport, then universities cannot justify spending millions of dollars on a small number of athletes who receive these benefits
while the majority of the student body is excluded from varsity competition. In fact, universities focus mostly on the ability of elite sport programs to bring money, notoriety, and prestige to their institutions, allowing “Arguments for the instrumental goods of intercollegiate athletics dominate the discussion” (French, 2004, p. 29). While universities hope to gain external benefits by promoting their athletic programs, earning a measure of financial success with both actual revenue (such as gate receipts and television contracts) and nationwide recognition (thereby potentially increasing applicants), student athletes are said to be playing for the internal goods of sport.

In the second myth, French (2004) focuses on the often-cited argument that sports build moral character (p. 33). However, French sees problems with this viewpoint, arguing that intercollegiate sport fails to do this because it focuses too much on winning. He writes, “Winning appears to be the primary, if not the only, value in Division I athletics. The Lombardi legacy prevails” (French, 2004, p. 36). Thus “most intercollegiate athletics contests are not good sports contests” and are therefore not likely to impart virtues and good moral character (French, 2004, p. 36). Additionally, win-at-all-costs attitudes prevent athletes from seeing coaches as serious moral role models. Therefore, the idea that college sport builds moral character is yet another myth of intercollegiate athletics.

For French, gender equity in intercollegiate sport is not only a myth, but also a “joke.” Statistical data show that many athletic programs do not reach the proportionality
standard set by Title IX. Furthermore, football and its enormous expenditures damage potential proportionality. French (2004) argues

although women’s sports may be making some inroads, it is a very long way from achieving the substantial proportionality condition of Title IX nationally. The safe harbor is a rather long way off, and the boosters of football make the waters especially rough and roiling (p. 69).

Essentially, proportionality and gender equity in sport are not a reality and will be nearly impossible to achieve as long as college sport continues to place most of its support on big-time men’s programs, such as football and basketball. Instead, artificial equity will be achieved by eliminating smaller (yet expensive) men’s programs in order to pay for small additions to women’s programs (French, 2004, pp. 76–77). In other words, superficial efforts toward proportionality will not generate substantial progress for gender equity.

The final myth identified by French concerns the funding associated with elite athletic programs, particularly the specious notion that sports programs earn large sums of money and turn sizeable profits. In-depth analyses of college’s bookkeeping suggest that most intercollegiate sport programs do not generate adequate revenues, yet they continue to pay coaches substantial salaries. French explains that this amounts to the exploitation of the university’s athletes, since players receive no salary, while colleges pay coaches and administrators millions of dollars. While athletics are a losing enterprise, colleges are still committed to providing these programs with exorbitant budgets and significant deficits. However, those who financially benefit from college sport (for example, highly paid coaches) do so by relying on the athletic performances of students.
who are “not paid for their services” (French, 2004, p. 92). Additionally, university contracts require athletes to wear apparel provided by companies that sponsor the school’s sport, even if the shoes and uniforms are ill-fitting (French, 2004, pp. 92–93). While universities and the NCAA profit from large commercial contracts with corporations like Nike and Gatorade, NCAA rules prohibit athletes from earning money from their image in any sort of direct commercial venture or sponsorship. However, in *O’Bannon v. NCAA* Judge Claudia Wilken’s injunction mandates that football and men’s basketball players be provided deferred payments for the use of the athlete’s name, image, and likeness of no less than $5,000 (Solomon, 2015).³ Despite this progress, athletes still face restrictions on their ability to earn money from their position as elite sportspersons. Therefore, because universities typically lose money in their athletic programs, yet continue to exploit their athletes in order to attempt to earn more, French argues that universities treat their student-athletes “as mere means to an end from which they only marginally benefit, if at all” (French, 2004, p. 93). In other words, universities use student-athletes as vehicles for profit, despite the fact that, in reality, little is made from college sport.

Finally, French (2004) describes what he sees as the truth about college sports—that intercollegiate athletics are clearly taking part in the business of entertainment (pp. 104–105). Huge stadiums and arenas and lucrative sponsorship contracts illustrate that individual universities are fully engaged in this commercially oriented practice. Additionally, the NCAA treats athletics as an entertainment enterprise. For example, for

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³ It should be noted that, as of March 17, 2015, this case returned to the 9th Circuit of the United States Court of Appeals upon the NCAA’s appeal of Wilken’s injunction (Solomon, 2015, para. 1–2).
the period of 2011-2024, the NCAA sold the March Madness television rights to CBS for $10.8 billion ("CBS Sports, Turner Broadcasting, NCAA Reach 14-Year Agreement," 2010, para. 1). However, French does not believe that seeing intercollegiate athletics as a form of entertainment is inherently bad—in fact, providing entertainment to the surrounding community may even be consistent with elements of the educational mission of the university. But, while coaches and administrators do not reject sport as entertainment in practice, they refuse to freely admit this reality. In fact, French (2004) argues, the scandals and ethical difficulties in college sport “seem to be due more to the fact that universities, the NCAA, coaches, and athletic directors cling to a mythologically based conception of their enterprise” than about the actual commercial entertainment of college sport (p. 121). Therefore for French, the problem is not so much that college sports entertain communities beyond the confines of the campus, but that athletes do not enjoy the rights of other entertainers. Because administrators and coaches continue to believe these myths about college sport, intercollegiate sports are, for French (2004), “little more than fancier plantations [like] those that existed in the antebellum American South” (p. 121).

French’s analysis of intercollegiate sport leads to the conclusion that the current system of collegiate sport is replete with serious problems. Despite his pointed criticisms, French does not condemn college sport as morally irredeemable or call for its elimination. But, his analysis does suggest that sport reformers must wrestle with problems related to the myths of amateurism, character education, gender equity, and
funding. French demonstrates that, while sport can provide valid and beneficial outcomes, it is still mired in moral controversy and fraught with ethical issues.

John R. Thelin, in *Games Colleges Play: Scandal and Reform in Intercollegiate Athletics*, provides a historical perspective on the pervasive problems in college sport, such as those identified by French. He identifies intercollegiate sport as a “peculiar institution” for a number of reasons. First, it is an expensive enterprise for universities to operate. Secondly, athletic administrators and coaches wield more power and influence than academic deans, thereby creating an odd hierarchy. Finally, colleges often bury athletics with other extracurriculars, “masking [its] actual importance” and misrepresenting, in formal reports, the complexity of the university’s sport institution (Thelin, 1994, pp. 1–2). His historical analysis of college sport recognizes that the issues surrounding athletics at the university are not new and suggests that we should be cautious of any claims about the benefits of college sport in light of its “long record of scandals” (Thelin, 1994, p. 8). In general, Thelin sees college sport as out of control and worries that the overemphasis on sport and winning, not learning and education, is especially problematic.

Furthermore, Thelin’s (1994) study addresses the “inertia” toward change in intercollegiate athletics (p. 192). For example, he discusses the Knight Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics, whose independent report recommended reforms in the areas of “academic integrity, financial integrity, and the independent certification of intercollegiate athletic programs” (Thelin, 1994, p. 190). The findings of this report did not stimulate widespread alterations to athletic programs, but instead inspired only slow
movements toward change and prompted mostly superficial transformations (Thelin, 1994, p. 192). Thelin argues that the fact that intercollegiate sports are slow to change indicates an acceptance of the status quo. Throughout the history of college athletics, Thelin (1994) notes, “The initial impulse of each era was to deplore the illegal and unethical activities in college sports, then proceed to make them legal” (p. 202). Administrators, coaches, players, and fans tacitly accepted certain morally suspicious activities, therefore often making rules prohibiting the wrongdoing unenforceable. Instead of reinforcing existing rules, the NCAA proceeded to allow many of these morally suspect practices. Because the NCAA and universities choose to sanction corrupt practices rather than challenge a problematic institution, college sport never undergoes substantial reform. College athletics, on Thelin’s pessimistic view, are likely to remain a tarnished practice polluted by moral compromises and attendant scandals.

In *Bowled Over: Big-Time College Football from the Sixties to the BCS Era*, Michael Oriard offers more specific criticisms of intercollegiate sport by focusing on big-time, Division I college football. Part of his argument focuses on commercialization, which he contends serves as the backdrop for a “series of academic and ethical crises” in intercollegiate sport (Oriard, 2009, p. 127). Oriard (2009) sees big-time college football as part of a fundamental contradiction between the commercial and financial benefits football gives a university and the experiences and welfare of the “student-athletes” who play on the teams (p. 128).

For Oriard, the adoption of the one year scholarship highlights this contradiction by providing coaches with excessive power over their athletes. Scholarship renewal is
dependent on athletic performance. With one year scholarships, coaches can demand more time from their players. Additionally, some athletes who wish to leave the team, in favor of pursuing educational goals, might be prevented from doing so because they cannot bear the financial burden of college without a scholarship (Oriard, 2009, p. 141). In other words, many athletes feel pressured into minimizing their educational goals in order to maintain their place on the team, and thus, retain their scholarship. Additionally, one-year scholarships resemble employment contracts, further underscoring Oriard’s conclusion that college football operates within a commercial world centered on business, not education (Oriard, 2009, p. 133). The developing notion of intercollegiate football as a business helped to eliminate the conflict between “coaches’ authority and athletes’ prerogatives, but at the cost of the athletes’ status as students” (Oriard, 2009, p. 133). Because “the renewal of scholarships [is] contingent on athletic performance, it absolutely put the lie to all pretenses about the primary importance of student-athletes” (Oriard, 2009, p. 140, emphasis original). This system puts the financial and commercial desires of the university above the educational needs of the student athletes.

Furthermore, Oriard (2009) contends that college football players “are more likely to arrive as athletes than as students” (p. 204). Coaches reinforce these attitudes by expecting players to take part not only in regular in-season practices, but also informal workouts and off-season weight lifting and conditioning sessions throughout the spring and summer. Coaches own most of the athlete’s time; thus, football players must sacrifice educational goals and classroom demands in order to maintain their position on the team. Since coaches are paid high salaries (sometimes millions of dollars), they feel obligated
to produce winning teams. Requiring more and more practice sessions, often insisting that players attend “voluntary” workout sessions and meetings beyond their NCAA-limited practice hours, coaches pressure student-athletes to place football first. As Oriard (2009) put it, “‘voluntary’ workouts are the scandal in college athletics that strangely fails to scandalize” (p. 205). These practice sessions interfere with athletes’ academic aspirations, as playing on big-time sports teams prevents football players with scholarly interests from fostering these pursuits. Unlike other “capable students” who “come to college with no burning intellectual passion and no particular direction, but would discover those passions and direction through exposure to the university’s intellectual and cultural life” athletes are “too often steered away from classes and majors that might prove too difficult” (Oriard, 2009, p. 207). Again, Oriard highlights the fundamental tension between the commercial interests of the university and the educational needs of student athletes.

French, Thelin, and Oriard’s scathing criticisms of college sport reinforce Francis’ conclusion that intercollegiate athletics are “bad for, and most likely not beneficial for, participants; bad for their fellow students and the universities; and bad for society in general” (Francis, 1993, p. 33). Their arguments support her claim that a feminist position should attempt to challenge and change sport rather than blindly enter a corrupted system and explicitly or tacitly adopt and endorse its values.

Francis’ position privileges reform over access. Although she recognizes the need for access within the current system, she focuses primarily on changing sport. Despite the strength of Francis’ position, my approach, once again, emphasizes the importance of
both access and reform—that is, access with reform. I recognize the importance of both and see them as more in terms of normative parity—without placing one over the other. Sport, as it exists, provides certain moral and nonmoral goods and is not a totally corrupted practice. There is much to be gained from participation, even under current conditions. Therefore, access (even without reform) is important. Despite these moral and nonmoral goods, though, as Francis, French, Thelin, and Oriard point out, numerous problems limit the value of intercollegiate sport. Therefore, for the best ethical athletic practices to occur, for maximal goods to be realized, reform also is necessary.

Although the corruptions noted by Francis, French, Thelin, and Oriard apply to all intercollegiate sport participants, Francis’ feminist position highlights the fact that sport is a place dominated by masculinity and hostile to femininity and women. This raises even more questions about women’s efforts to enter this domain. Her analysis hints at a need for reform that takes into account the particular needs, experiences, and make-up of women and girls. If she is right, it will be important to consider the potential differences between athletic experiences of men and women in effecting intercollegiate sport reform. In the next section, I will look at the need for gender-sensitive analyses for sport reform.

The Need for Feminist Reform in Intercollegiate Sport

Although a new model of sport that responded to the critiques of French, Thelin, and Oriard, would make sport better for everyone, it ignores questions about gender. It does not take into consideration how culturally constructed notions of masculinity and femininity impact the sporting experience. Thus, in some ways, most reform efforts
tacitly accept hegemonic masculinity as the default position, again rendering feminine and other masculine perspectives irrelevant or of lesser importance. The point is that, even in a reformed model of sport based only on French, Thelin, and Oriard’s considerations may still be incomplete.

The current focus on increasing opportunities for women in sport, while worthy, may perpetuate the second-class status of female athletes. Hegemonic masculinity continues to prevail in sport and relies on differentiated femininity as inferior in order to maintain its position. Therefore, exclusively focusing on gaining entry into the current athletic realm, or even a “reformed” athletic realm, may be insufficient. Changing the system might be necessary. This is not to say that liberal feminist projects for equality and more opportunity are not worthy. Indeed, as argued by Francis, so long as the current system of sport remains in place, justice requires that women are afforded the same opportunities as men. However, I argue that awareness of the gendered structure of sport can strengthen reform efforts.

One way that some feminists generate ideas for sport reform is through analyses of women’s experiences. In other words, women’s perspectives provide important clues for creating better opportunities for female athletes, and quite likely, male athletes as well. Leslie A. Howe, in “Being and Playing: Sport and the Valorization of Gender,” focuses on women in hockey. She concludes her analysis with a question: “how do women appropriate or reconstitute this game for themselves?” (Howe, 2007, p. 342). For Howe (2007), it is important that women “find a way to take control of their own game and determine their own future in it” (p. 343). She notes, however, that this version of the
women’s game need not fall into stereotypical feminine traits, as they represent a
distorted version of human nature, just as stereotypical masculine identities do (Howe,
2007, p. 342). Instead, this women’s game will draw from human traits that women (and men) share along with traits that may be gender specific. Her analysis speaks to the need for nuanced gender perspectives in sport, where hegemonic masculinity is questioned.

The history of women’s sport and physical activity, as noted in Chapter 2, revealed repeated attempts to answer the following question: how can women build a place from themselves in athletics? In the 19th and 20th centuries, women physical educators attempted to tailor physical education classes specifically for their female students. During the 1970s and 1980s, the AIAW created a governing body for women’s collegiate athletics that maintained values and goals that distinguished it from the NCAA and men’s college sport. Though these attempts, and others like them, are typically seen as unsuccessful, each challenge to the masculine system of sport, I would argue, contains kernels of truth. (For a more complete discussion of attempts by women to enter the sportsworld and create a place for themselves within it, see Chapter 2). My dissertation follows this history, aiming to create a version of competitive sport that values the experiences of women and girls. Like Howe, I suggest that feminist perspectives and a deeper understanding of the role of gender in sport must be taken into account when creating a feminist model for intercollegiate sport reform.

Noting the importance of women’s experiences in sport is not a new endeavor. Howe falls within a rich history of feminist sport philosophers addressing the unique feminine experience in sport. In this section, I will detail the literature of feminist sport
philosophy that deals with this topic in order to situate my arguments within an existing feminist sport framework. Although my recommendations will not necessarily adopt these viewpoints, this scholarship provides groundwork for the relevance of uniquely feminist perspectives in improving sport for all. This is not an exhaustive review, but it does highlight important research by highlighting efforts to maintain feminist perspectives in sport.

**Early Analyses of Women’s Role and Experience in Sport**

In the late 1970s, a few feminist sport philosophers addressed the importance of equity for women in sport. At this time, Title IX had recently gone into effect, but women had not yet gained much parity. They still had few opportunities to participate in sport at any level—from interscholastic and intercollegiate athletics to professional sport. However, both Iris Marion Young and Jane English noted the importance of women’s experiences with movement, their bodies, and sport. For Young and English the partially unique lived-experiences of women deserved to be taken seriously because such differences would play a role in feminist-led sport reform.

In “Throwing Like a Girl: A Phenomenology of Feminine Body Comportment, Motility, and Spatiality,” Young highlights the experiences of women in movement, with special attention paid to sporting acts, such as throwing a ball. Her phenomenological account follows the work of Merleau-Ponty and argues that women experience their bodies differently than men because women often see themselves as a body-object rather than body-subject. In particular, “feminine motility” operates in three ways: as
“ambiguous transcendence,” “inhibited intentionality,” and “discontinuous unity” (Young, 2005, p. 35). Because women experience ambiguous transcendence, they do not experience “pure fluid action” and use only parts of their body; they never interact fully and completely with their surroundings (Young, 2005, p. 36). Furthermore, skilled and healthy bodies project any number of “I cans” but women often encounter these potential movements “as the possibilities of ‘someone,’ and not truly her possibilities” (Young, 2005, p. 37, emphasis original). Therefore, Young (2005) argues, women instead project “‘I cannot,’” thereby limiting their motility (p. 37). Thus, an inhibited intentionality characterizes the body’s abilities while also (and primarily) illustrating the body’s inabilitys. Finally, the discontinuous unity experienced in feminine movement “severs the connection between aim and enactment, between possibility in the world and capacity in the body” (Young, 2005, p. 38). Overall, these experiences are “root[ed] in the fact that feminine existence experiences the body as a mere thing...that exists as looked at and acted upon” (Young, 2005, p. 39, emphasis original).

These experiences of feminine motility result in women confining their spatial motility to smaller places than men. For example, Young argues that, unlike men, when women throw, they focus most of their movement on the arm, instead of using large areas of their body, such as the back, shoulders, and arms. Additionally, they cause hesitancy and uncertainty for women attempting physical tasks—instead of moving with confidence, women feel that they cannot perform the movement or fear injury. Young concludes that feminine intentionality in motility includes a simultaneous intention of

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4 Although citations reference Young’s “Throwing Like a Girl” are from 2005, the essay was originally published in 1980.
performing a movement while also not fully committing to actual movement for fear of not accomplishing it. In other words, feminine bodily existence prevents transcendence over movement and engagement fully in the world, in addition to reinforcing the feminine body as an object, not a moving subject. Again, this stems from the idea that women view themselves as objects, at least in terms of movement. Because of this, Young (2005) states that “The woman lives her space as confined and closed around her, at least in part as projecting some small area in which she can exist as a free subject” (p. 45). In other words, Young claims that women live claustrophobically and fearfully in terms of being free subjects and performing purposeful human movements in time and space.

In addition to recognizing that women’s bodily experiences in movement are different from those of men, Young also argues that sports are rooted in masculine activities. In her article, “The Exclusion of Women from Sport: Conceptual and Existential Dimensions,” Young (2010) challenges the masculine conception of sports which she claims originates from “male experiences in sex segregated activities, such as hunting or warfare” while no sports “have arisen from the specific activities of women or from women’s specific experience” (p. 18). This male bias has the effect of excluding women from participation and portraying those who do take part in athletics as inferior to men. Although Young (2010) notes that equality is aided by the entrance of women into “masculinist” sport, she argues that sport requires the invention and inclusion of “physical activities presently outside or on the boundaries of sport” in order to actually remove the harmful masculinist aspects of sport (p. 18). Furthermore, when women do
participate in sport, society sees them as objects and that this objectification leads to the idea that, “either she is not ‘really’ a woman, or the sport she engages in is not ‘really’ a sport” (Young, 2010, p. 15). Because women are often seen as inferior athletes and their bodies are routinely objectified, they face barriers to participation in sport. For Young, decreasing the excessively masculine focus on sport and increasing the presence of female qualities may improve athletics and open athletic doors for more women.

English also supports reforms in sport aimed at moving away from hegemonic masculinity. In “Sex Equality in Sports,” English (1978) argues that sport is unjust because most games were invented by men and for men. That is, “our concept of ‘sports’ contains a male bias” (English, 1978, p. 276). She emphasizes the need for athletics to cater specifically to women, and specifically to their physiology. Instead of portraying women as physiologically inferior, as many male-dominated and male-constructed sports do, English contends that a wider variety of sport types are needed to alter spectator appeal and enhance self-respect for women athletes. Finally, English (1978) sees a just society as one where “alternative sports using women’s distinctive abilities and which rewards those equally is preferable to a society which only maintains protected classes for women in sports” (p. 277). Women-only teams, while assuring participation, also carry negative messages. She believes that women’s unique abilities (in this case, skills focused better on female physiology) must be taken into account for an equitable system of athletics to exist.

The ideas put forth by Young and English were important stepping stones for feminist inquiry in sport even though some of their suggestions may seem antiquated. For
example, Young’s phenomenological analysis of female bodily movement might be modified by many contemporary female athletes who have benefitted from better coaching and training. Instead of feeling hesitant, many current women athletes report living their bodies with confidence and surety. Furthermore, English’s call for new sports for women might be difficult to implement for at least two reasons. First, with an increase in sport participation, millions of girls and women have grown to enjoy and achieve very high levels of skill participating in sports that favor masculine traits, such as basketball, soccer, and football. Secondly, women and girls have, in some ways, taken traditionally masculine sports and made them their own. For instance, women’s and men’s basketball look different and favor different skills. Thus, while Young and English’s arguments may contain elements of truth and serve as reminders that women’s perspectives must be taken seriously in sport, their recommended solutions are not likely to gain much traction in the 21st century. This is so, in part, because women athletes have achieved so much in virtually all sporting domains—even those that have historical roots in male-dominated behaviors.

**Toward Feminist Conceptions of Sport**

Subsequent to the publication of Young and English’s articles, a number of feminist sport philosophers have taken various approaches to understanding women’s perspectives in sport and striving for equality. While many feminist sport philosophers have written about gender awareness in sport and support a movement toward a feminist conception of sport that seeks to challenge the masculine hegemony typically present in
most athletics, I will focus particularly on the work of two. Because I will only focus on two authors, my review is not exhaustive of contemporary feminist sport literature, but instead points to a few ideas that lead toward challenging the traditional gender roles perpetuated by most athletics. Specifically, Joan Grassbaugh Forry and Michael Burke look at an important conceptual problem in sport that points to a way to challenge hegemonic masculinity. Both Forry and Burke recognize that the characteristics valued by sport denegrate and oppress women.

In a chapter entitled, “Toward a Somatic Sport Feminism,” Forry (2013) defines somatic sport feminism as “concerned with gendered bodily experiences as they occur in the context of sport and fitness practices” with a specific understanding of “how the systematic restrictions on women’s freedom shape bodily experiences” (p. 128). Forry (2013) recognizes the interaction between gender and habit, where “bodies become gendered via a process of interpreting socio-cultural prescriptions and then expressing this interpretation through one’s body” (p. 141).

For Forry (2013), somatic sport feminism “is devoted to the project of describing and articulating the gendered features of spatiality, physicality, and movement as they operate within sporting contexts” (p. 147). However, she argues, along the same line as Young, that inhibited feminine bodily movements represent a manifestation of women’s

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5 The analyses of these feminist sport philosophers include a wide variety of topics, including the objectification of female athletes (Davis, 2010; McLeod, 2010; Weaving, 2010), the possibility for women’s empowerment through sport (Hämäläinen, 2013), the potential for mixed-gender competitions (Burke, 2010; Sailors, 2013), definitions of what it means to be a woman in sport (Schneider, 2010), and the role of Title IX in gender equity (J. Boxill, 1993; Francis, 1993; Simon, 1993). The authors of these articles write from a range of perspectives: some from a liberal feminist perspective that seeks to increase access for women athletes and others from a more radical standpoint that emphasizes change in sport rather than maintenance of the current system.
oppression (Forry, 2013, p. 148). Because somatic sport feminism recognizes this, it opens up new avenues for women’s freedom. Changing and forming new habits, especially by “countering the restrictive nature of feminine existence” present in many movements, allows for social and political empowerment. Forry’s (2013) somatic sport feminism—which acknowledges the unique experience of women—provides an account that both “explain[s] women’s oppression” and understands “the embodied strategies for combating women’s oppression” (p. 151).

Michael Burke, in “A Feminist Reconstruction of Liberal Rights in Sport,” takes a liberal feminist perspective that argues that women should have the right to compete against men in sport. Although this is a liberal analysis, his underlying message remains one that challenges the masculine hegemony of sport, where women have “opportunities…to challenge the existing gender hierarchy” (Burke, 2010, p. 13). Burke prioritizes access in his challenge to the masculine nature of sport. However, he recognizes that liberal feminism (and general access) is not sufficient for changing sport. Instead, by gaining more positions, and more positions of power, women can use these to “develop new ways of being athletically female that challenge existing gender hierarchies” (Burke, 2010, p. 22). In other words, Burke recognizes the potential differences between men and women and the importance of access, but hopes that ultimately women can use this access to challenge the existing system.

Furthermore, Burke (2013) argues for a distinctive brand of women’s competitions that is seen as “alternative, not deficient” (p. 44). Burke (2013) critiques myopic views of sport where “excellence in sports has been narrowly defined in terms
that generally suit male authority” (p. 47). Because of these narrow definitions of success in athletics, opportunities for women (especially powerful positions) are limited. Burke concludes that sport is a type of “leaky hegemony” (a term used by Cole and Birrell), where women’s presence and participation can break down the hegemonic masculinity that has created the present system. He therefore argues that feminist standpoints can challenge and complement existing notions of sport and athletic excellence. Thus, the inclusion of more women in sport undermines hegemonic masculinity and helps to transform it into something with broader definitions of excellence.

Though Forry and Burke take different approaches toward feminist sport, they both acknowledge the importance of women’s perspectives. For Forry, an understanding of women’s bodily movements and oppression can help female athletes gain power and change their habits. This understanding emphasized by Forry (2013), one that takes seriously the interaction between bodies and cultures, “contributes to the cultivation of a feminist consciousness” and helps to “explain women’s oppression” (pp. 149–151). Although a mere understanding of the interactions does not lead to empowerment on its own, it does open possibilities for changing habits, which leads to “countering the restrictive nature of feminine existence” (Forry, 2013, p. 150). By taking women’s experiences as a potential valuable contribution to the contemporary system of athletics, Forry indicates that unique feminine bodily existence can challenge hegemonic masculinity in sport, that women’s experiences are a valuable contribution to challenging the contemporary system of athletics. On the other hand, Burke’s approach is more liberal in nature—his arguments center more on the need for greater access—but still
recognizes the need for women’s perspectives in challenging what it means to be excellent in sport.

These analyses indicate that feminist perspectives, capabilities, and values must play a role in better supporting athletes. While the focus of most of these analyses is on women’s role in sport, they also have implications for men who do not fit into the mold of hegemonic masculinity. Steering sport away from elements of masculinity that are exclusive aids in creating more justice and fairness for both women and men.

My analysis follows in the tradition of these feminist philosophers. It recognizes that bettering sport for women and men requires a movement away from hegemonic masculinity. Acknowledging that a variety of perspectives, both feminine and masculine, can play a role in sport can lead to more gender inclusive sport structures. Despite the corruption, there is, I believe, like Francis, French, Thelin, and Oriard have argued, something worth saving in American intercollegiate sport. Because these internal goods that are not morally suspect should be maintained, the changes I advocate are, in a sense, conservative. I seek to eliminate corruption in sport, rather than question the validity of competitive sport practices altogether. Therefore, in many cases, I will be arguing for modest athletic reforms, gradations of difference, modifications in emphasis, somewhat more or less of elements that are already part and parcel of the sporting experience.

The following chapter will put forth general reforms, such as those promoted by the works of French, Thelin, and Oriard. In Chapter 5, I will attempt to describe changes that must be made in order for sport to be better for all. Although I acknowledge the need for increased access to sport for women, the analyses in Chapter 5 will focus on
challenging masculine hegemony through reform. These reforms, in other words, challenge the dominant sporting order.
Chapter 5

Three Domains for Intercollegiate Athletic Reform

In chapter 2, I outlined sport philosophy scholarship that suggest potential sites for reform in sport, including the meaning of victory, the pursuit of excellence, relationships with opponents, and relationships with teammates. In this chapter, I make an argument that builds on this work. Instead of focusing only on individual areas for reform, I argue that a framework that takes into account three potential sites for change makes sense. These include: (1) attitudes toward winning, (2) alternate sources for meaning valued by sport participants and spectators, and (3) interpersonal relationships amongst both teammates and opponents. This argument places problems with hypercompetitive attitudes at the center of the analysis of reform.

These three areas are important to sport in many ways. First, competition plays a key role in athletics—contests require that teams and individuals try to do better than one another. However, the extraordinarily high value accorded to victory is arguably undeserved. Because of this, winning and its role in sports can serve as a potential site for reform. Additionally, some athletes take part in sport because it provides multiple possibilities for value, including aesthetic pleasure, individual improvement, excitement, personal meaning, and the pursuit of knowledge, skills, and excellence. Sport philosophers have identified these areas, in addition to winning, as potential locations for value and meaning. Thus, reform efforts can attempt to increase attention paid to these alternatives. Finally, interpersonal relationships hold a prominent place in athletics. In order for successful athletic contests to occur, cooperation between teammates (in team
sports) and opponents (in all sports) is required. But often such relationships are strictly instrumental and fail to reflect appropriate levels of mutual respect and understanding. Others are seen and treated strictly as means to personal or team goals rather than as ends in themselves. Therefore, reform efforts might also be aimed at transforming how competitors and teammates see one another.

Focusing specifically on the excessive and obsessive emphasis on winning helps lay the conceptual groundwork for this chapter. A preoccupation with winning overshadows other outcomes and values in athletics. Athletes and coaches often demonstrate this attitude in their comments and behaviors. Echoing the frequently quoted Lombardi ideal (“Winning isn’t everything—it’s the only thing”), New England Patriots quarterback Tom Brady recently stated that “There is only one stat that matters . . . I think winning games is the most important thing” (Manza Young, 2014, para. 7). Because a fixation on winning trumps any attention that might be paid to alternative values and because it frequently colors relationships with opponents and teammates, it will receive priority attention in the reforms I suggest. Victory is often paraded as the only value worth pursuing in sport at the cost of belittling other goods associated with competition. Such alternate goods of competitive projects are accorded secondary importance at best, and little or no importance at worst.

This is the case for several reasons. First, the heart of the sporting project involves trying to win. While multiple values and the development of strong relationships emerge from sport, athletics is not about these things per se. It is about attempting to complete a physical test better than someone else. Without competition, the sporting project is lost.
Second, multiple values and interpersonal relationships are dependent on trying to win. Without attempting to win, athletes would have reduced opportunities to enhance their athletic skill, increase their knowledge, or develop relationships with others. The sporting project assumes competition. It does not assume alternate values or interpersonal relationships. These are byproducts of sport, not key elements of it.

Finally, an over-emphasis on winning will receive primary attention because competition often blinds both players and coaches. An excessive focus on victory leads athletes away from alternate values and interpersonal relationships. Furthermore, most athletes are not obsessively consumed by a powerful drive to gain knowledge or develop strong friendships, while many are excessively focused on winning. Therefore, in this chapter, discussions of reforms related to the mitigation of win-at-all costs attitudes will take precedence over changes to other areas in athletics. Consequently, the three areas for reform (de-emphasizing the importance of victory, finding alternate sites for meaning, and building strong interpersonal relationships) are not of equal significance. Once again, alternate sites for meaning and interpersonal relations can only undergo change when attitudes toward competition and winning are transformed. Therefore, my analysis will emphasize the reinterpretation of attitudes, behaviors, and values associated with victory before evaluating the roles of alternative sites of meaning and interpersonal relationships.

**De-emphasizing the Importance of Victory**

In this section, I will argue that one solution for reforming sport lies in how we conceptualize and to what degree we emphasize competition. For college sport to become
a morally acceptable practice, win-at-all-costs attitudes and behaviors must be eliminated. To enact this transformation and challenge the status quo of sport, I contend that a reconceptualization of attitudes toward competition that focuses on degrees of success is necessary. The reconceptualization seeks to complement the current dichotomous and exclusionary understanding that centers on winning and not-winning or winning and losing. Additionally, this reconceptualization calls into question the accuracy of the stories associated with winning and losing. I will include an analysis of why winning not only fails to tell the full story but often also fails, even on its own dichotomous terms, to tell an accurate story. Finally, to further de-emphasize the importance of victory, I call for a re-emphasis on the variable outcomes associated with a sporting contest, including playing well on the test, improving on the test, playing well in the contest, and improving in the contest.

Although this section focuses on de-emphasizing victory, I recognize that competition and attempting to win are important elements of sport. In this analysis, I reject the scholarship of radical critics of competition, such as the sociologist Alfie Kohn (1992). He, and others, argue that society’s problems (and sport’s problems in particular) stem not from a dysfunctional form of competition, but rather from competition itself. In other words, on the view of these radical critics, the competitive enterprise is inherently corrupt.

6 Others agree with Kohn’s extreme view. The feminist scholar Victoria Davion notes that many feminists see competition either as war, or creating war-like mentalities. Either way, according to Davion (1987), many feminists believe that competition “encourage[s] hatred toward others” (p. 55). Some youth leagues take the advisement of eliminating competition seriously. For example, in 2013, the Ontario Soccer Association enacted a policy where the number of goals scored in games of children twelve and under will not be officially tallied and standings will not be kept (Keilman, 2013).
Most sport philosophers disagree with this claim and believe that problems in sport are exacerbated by overly competitive behaviors or caused by defective forms of competition. However, such problems are not inherent in the practice itself. My own analysis will follow these moderate sport philosophers, taking the position that, while attitudes toward winning must be tempered, competition is an integral and morally defensible part of athletic contests. I agree with Simon who claims, “critics of overemphasis on winning and competitive success may take their points too far by ignoring the perhaps equally deleterious effects of underemphasis” (Simon, 2010, p. 37). So, while excessive competitive behaviors should be considered morally suspect, I argue that competition is not inherently problematic and will try to show why this is the case.

**Reconceptualizing the Attitudes toward Winning and Losing**

Despite the fact that competition may not be problematic in and of itself, cultural mores place an unwarranted emphasis on winning, attitudes that extend beyond the realm of athletics. Everyday language uses the terms “winner” and “loser” to connote either success or failure as human beings, not just as athletes. Society typically crowns those with financial prosperity, successful business ventures, or high achievement in science or art, in addition to those that accumulate victories on the playing field, as winners. Even when no clear contest is present, for instance when individuals are educated, handsome, or well-off, they are dubbed “winners.” Additionally, “loser” typically connotes a person who does not meet the expectations for success as defined by a specific culture. Schoolyard bullies taunt their classmates with the term. Those with unsuccessful careers,
poor test scores, and lesser socio-economic success are called “losers.” Colloquially then, the terms winner and loser go beyond the meanings associated with competitive sporting events. These everyday appellations indicate just how important victory has become in American culture. The importance of victory in wider society both causes athletes and coaches to overvalue winning and is caused by the fact that coaches and athletes obsessively value the accumulation of victories. Either way, sport and attitudes toward winning in athletic settings are much like the culture in which they reside.

In order to mitigate these hypercompetitive attitudes prevalent in sport, the focus of sport must be recalibrated to soften the importance of the dichotomy between winning and losing. Instead, the outcome of a contest can be seen as embodying difference by degree, not kind. An over-emphasis on winning can also be diminished by recognizing that victories (and defeats) do not always tell the full or accurate story of the contest. Focusing only on the competitive outcome (winning or losing) not only ignores a host of other results of the contest but also fails to recognize that winning and losing do not necessarily indicate the quality of performances for either side in a game.

**Challenging the Dichotomous Nature of Winning and Losing**

In current sport practices, differences in kind (where players and teams either win or lose) overshadow degrees of difference (where players and teams have varying amounts of success or failure). For example, on dichotomous models of competition, losing by 50 points is essentially equivalent to losing by two points. Both outcomes
signal defeat. In both scenarios, the winner reaps rewards fully at the expense of the loser. Little attention is paid to qualitative differences between the two outcomes.

Typical questions about an athlete’s performance illustrate this dichotomous, zero-sum concept. Usually, interested inquirers ask “Did you win?” not “How well did you play?” or “How much did you improve?” By focusing on the dichotomously-framed fact that athletes either win or lose, we overlook the continuity-framed fact that athletic performances come with varying degrees of success in testing, contesting, and improving.

Competition remains intelligible when considered as a site for determining differences in degree rather than differences in kind. Losing by 50 points is not equivalent to losing by two points. Narrow margins of victory indicate closer contests and more evenly matched skill sets. In point of fact, winning and losing are not mutually exclusive opposites, but merely places on a continuum of success and failure. A final score of 80-20 is a place on the continuum where a larger degree of winning was attained by one side and very little winning was experienced by the other. A score of 51-49, on the other hand places competitors at another location on the continuum, one in which the winning and losing is almost evenly shared by both players or teams. By considering competition in this respect, the limitations of dichotomous ways of perceiving victory and defeat come into stronger focus. Therefore, I argue that a reconceptualization of attitudes toward competition can expand our notions of athletic success and the meanings associated with it.

This reconceptualized notion of competition complements the idea that winning and losing are dichotomous. It does not seek to replace this system, but rather stands as a
second, valid way of understanding the nature and outcomes of competitive athletics. By working in concert with the dichotomy, this reconceptualization allows for winning and losing (dichotomously understood) to remain important because this dramatic framework tells us something about how well or poorly we have played and provides meaningful goals for which to strive. However, the non-dichotomous reconceptualization attempts to draw attention to the fact that degrees of difference carry significance as well. This way, the impact of winning or losing is not as significant, and winners and losers alike have additional resources for evaluating and hopefully celebrating competitive outcomes.

The reconceptualization of competition draws, in part, from analyses of Zen Buddhist practices that temper the dichotomy between winning and losing. Eugen Herrigel and Brian Richardson’s analyses of Zen in sport criticize Western sporting practices that sharply divide victory and defeat. Instead, Herrigel (1999) and Richardson (2012) argue that athletes should not dwell on the categories of achievement and failure but should live in the present moment for the particular blend of achievement~failure that it is and move on to the next task. Herrigel (1999), who studied the art of archery in Japan with Master Awa, reinforces this principle by, after hitting his mark, following the Master’s command, “Now go on practicing as if nothing had happened” (p. 53). Master Awa advocates that athletes, in this case archers, should not focus on whether or not they accurately hit the target but instead must live in the present moment as the relative success~failure event that it is. Furthermore, the Master’s wisdom—“You know already that you should not grieve over bad shots; learn now not to rejoice over the good
ones’”—guides Herrigel away from the dichotomy of winning and losing and encourages him to build and improve his skills (Herrigel, 1999, p. 60).

Richardson’s approach also explicitly highlights the Zen imperative to live in the present and integrates that into his approach for sport. He argues that, for an enlightened athlete,

Every moment, every play, every inning of every game is the continuum of winning–losing, passing–failing. Every moment has each within it. To stop to assess success vs. failure is to no longer be in the moment and no longer just playing the sport (Richardson, 2012, pp. 148–149).

For Richardson, athletes should encounter their successes not as part of a dichotomy, but rather as particular locations along a spectrum of degrees of success and failure. Accordingly, both Herrigel and Richardson recognize that an over-emphasis on the dichotomy between winning and losing can be potentially harmful to skill development of the athlete. They conclude that Zen or Zen-like approaches to competition can, in part, solve this problem.

Taking a Zen Buddhist approach to sport is not the only way to move away from the dichotomous conceptualization of sport outcomes that is often found in more Western, analytic traditions. Looking at degrees of success, both in comparison to opponents and in comparison to the self, allows for a fuller understanding of athletic performance. This can be seen by noting that a sharp distinction between winning and losing requires a difference in kind—on a 100 point scale, anything above 50 indicates victory and in philosophic terms might be identified as “A” while anything below 50
indicates defeat and is identified as “not-A.” However, when dichotomous understandings carry less weight, differences by degree can become more significant. For example, an athlete who loses 52-48 can take much pride in his or her performance, despite losing. The focus is not on whether a team or player falls on one side of a determined cut point, but how far away he or she is from this point.

Differences by degree provide important information that is missing in standard dichotomous accounts and help promote a more nuanced understanding of performance. With a greater emphasis on degrees of success, instead of differences in kind, close contests between evenly matched teams would hold more value for both winners and, particularly, losers. Victors, while successful from a competitive standpoint, may gain more knowledge and enjoyment from a close contest rather than a blowout. Losers can reflect on and celebrate their accomplishments, excellences, and skill development more easily when they are not inextricably tied to some all-or-nothing notion of competitive success.

Landing directly on the cut point (50) indicates a tie, which oddly is often seen as a failed contest. It is odd because this would seem to be simply one possible comparative outcome among many. In fact, ties help illuminate the importance of degrees of difference. When two teams compete in an even match, their skill levels are nearly indistinguishable. In cases like this, teams and players can accurately gauge their skill level, even though the comparison indicates that their skill levels are nearly identical, both in terms of the basic necessary testing abilities and in contesting talent. Even though a winner is not declared, the knowledge produced by a tie is valuable. Ties can actually
tell as accurate a story of the match as can clear wins and losses. No difference, some difference, and considerable difference are, in principle, three valid and interesting outcomes of sporting competitions among an infinite variety of possible comparative results.

The knowledge gained from even contests further discourages the dichotomous understanding of sport outcomes, as Cesar Torres and Douglas McLaughlin (2003) noted in their analysis of ties. For them, ties serve as desirable outcomes, where the even score indicates two well-matched opponents that cannot be accurately differentiated. On the other hand, cultural conceptions of ties, often referred to pejoratively as “kissing your sister,” portray an even outcome as unfavorable. Additionally, tie-breaking practices force even outcomes into the putatively more desirable victory and defeat columns, a practice that Torres and McLaughlin (2003) deem “unfair” (p. 154). Their analysis indicates that the general distaste of ties that produces a kind of athletic “indigestion” seems, in an important way, “to misunderstand the very purpose of the sporting contest” (Torres & McLaughlin, 2003, p. 156). This suggests that, for them, the purpose of the sport contest is not merely to crown a victor, but to achieve and accurately record “athletic progress” (Torres & McLaughlin, 2003, p. 150). But, as Torres and McLaughlin argue, contests need not end with a clear winner and loser. Instead, ties can be a perfectly acceptable outcome, further strengthening the case for focusing on degrees of difference, not differences in kind.
Reconceptualizing attitudes toward competition reveals that excessive focus on winning and losing tells an incomplete story by glossing over or ignoring distinctions related to quality of play, relative degrees of difference, and personal progress. Furthermore, analyses by Nicholas Dixon and David Carr suggest that winning also does not always accurately reflect the athlete’s skill level or actual achievements. Their arguments indicate that, because competitors do not typically exercise full control over the outcome of a contest, the results cannot be wholly reliable indicators of success, achievement, or skill development. This applies both within the current system of dichotomous thinking and the within the reconceptualized model. The significance of the results of a game, whether they indicate winning, playing well, losing, or playing poorly, must be tempered. If Dixon and Carr are right, athletes must practice humility and cannot take full credit for the results. This fact alone places logical limitations on the meanings and importance of winning. Or said another way, winning is often not all that it is trumped up to be.

Dixon (1999) argues that the circumstances surrounding some victories demonstrate that the outcome might not always be indicative of superiority. Sometimes, the better team loses. Bad luck, unpredictable weather, and refereeing errors, for instance, may all play a significant role in the outcome of an athletic contest. According to Dixon (1999), “while regarding the winner as the better athlete is generally a harmless convention, on some occasions it leads to inaccurate judgments of athletic superiority” (p. 19). To be sure, Dixon also acknowledges that these judgments occur during a fair
contest, but that sometimes, a better player or team loses. However, he sees this as a potential opportunity for promoting reform. “A welcome consequence of our realization that a wide range of situations exist in which the better team or player does not win,” he concludes, “may be to weaken the obsession with winning that exists among some athletes” (Dixon, 1999, p. 24).

Carr’s analysis also raises questions about the inordinate importance placed on winning. He highlights the role of genetic endowment and relevant biological factors and their impact on sporting ability. For Carr (1999), natural skills and characteristics call into question the credit a winner or superior athlete can take for his or her achievements. His argument centers on the fact that athletic potential is partly innate and that a person “is due no more credit for [it] than one is for the endowment of Goliath-like height or Samson-like strength” (Carr, 1999, p. 4). Carr’s analysis suggests that athletes should operate with some humility because they cannot take full credit for their achievements. Instead, players should develop “a proper modesty about the source of our sporting, athletic, and other talents and achievements” (Carr, 1999, p. 9). These successes include various outcomes, such as winning, playing well, and improving. A sort of self-effacement must be present in light of all outcomes associated with sport, as credit cannot be wholly attributed to teams and individuals for their successes.

Questions about whether or not the better player or team wins, and the role of innate abilities and characteristics in sporting achievement, suggest that winners can neither be given full credit for their victories nor blamed entirely for defeats. In addition to genetic endowments, games may be won due to refereeing errors, imperfect scoring
systems, poor weather conditions, equipment failure, or any variety of unfortunate chance occurrences. Although most sport practices attempt to eliminate the role of luck, and in some cases, the better team should be able to overcome umpiring deficiencies, outcomes can be and are affected by these factors. This may be particularly true in close contests, where one bad call can change the course of the game or where one dropped ball by an outfielder, blinded by the sun, makes the difference between winning and losing. It also affects degrees of difference in contesting, testing, measures of quality of play, and determinations of improvement. Therefore, whether conceptualizing sporting outcomes dichotomously or not, it makes sense for winners, high achievers, and those who show marked improvement to adopt a sense of humility and a degree of self-effacement. And once again, winning, for all of these various reasons, may not mean as much as many think it does.

Conceptually, an inordinate focus on and valuation of winning poses a problem because it tells an inaccurate, or at least incomplete, story. It may be inaccurate because, in some circumstances, the team or athlete who possesses superior athletic skill and talent loses. Genetic endowments, unfavorable weather conditions, and bad (or good) luck demonstrate that, sometimes, the winner does not deserve all the credit (nor does the loser deserve all the blame) that winning and losing purport to denote. It may be incomplete because victory only tells us about one part of the outcome—who scored the most points. Victory does not tell us how well-matched the teams were or the level of skill demonstrated by winner or loser.
Reconceptualizing attitudes toward competition suggests that winning is not as valuable as it seems because it often tells an incomplete and inaccurate story. Instead, athletes can find success through playing well, improving, and contesting well. They can also recognize that the outcome of the game does not indicate the conditions of the competition—weather, luck, officiating, or any other extenuating circumstances that may lead to winning. Thus, victory and defeat are too simple a metric to tell the complex story of sport competitions. The inaccuracy and incompleteness of the story threatens all conceptualizations of competition and it provides additional reasons for complementing dichotomous understandings of winning and losing with a model of sport that focuses more on degrees of difference and less on differences in kind. When a complex performance result is reduced to only two categories—winning and losing—the potentially significant role of these many contingencies is magnified.

This significance becomes clear when considering a hypothetical 51-49 victory by Team A that was due to a gross umpiring error. This is still a victory. However, preserving the slight degree of difference between the two teams acknowledges Team B’s 49 and allows us to ameliorate the injustice (Team B nearly won!). Additionally, this close score, with a small degree of difference even raises legitimate questions about the accuracy of the dichotomous verdict (Is it possible that Team B deserved to win? Was Team A really the better team on that day?).

An obsessive focus on winning provides a caricature of the athletic event. It is true that in nearly all contests, one team or individual wins and another loses. It is also true that this is an important outcome. However, the value of this truth is exaggerated
when achievements are reduced to but two categories and when these “achievements”
have an uneven and thus uncertain relationship to human agency and merit. By
reconceptualizing attitudes toward competition to soften the dichotomy between winning
and losing and thereby re-emphasize other outcomes, the picture of sport looks more like
a realistic portrait than a cartoonish caricature. In this portrait, victory and defeat continue
to be important aspects of sporting events, but remain proportional to the outcomes
associated with how well or poorly an athlete plays, how much improvement an athlete
sees on the test, how well or poorly an athlete competes, how much improvement an
athlete sees in the contest, and any potentially corrupted results.

**Expanding the Outcomes in Competitive Sport**

To be sure, competitive outcomes understood as difference in kind can provide
valuable insight into athletic performance. It matters whether or not a team wins or loses.
For instance, dramatic tension can be enhanced by a cut point that carries normative
value. Moreover, winning (at least in even matches) requires the use of important testing
and contesting skills. It requires human agency, human virtue broadly understood, and,
as such, deserves to be rewarded.

However, understanding competition as a vehicle for showing difference by
degree also serves an important and visible role in sport. To further aid in understanding
this vehicle, four areas of re-emphasis should be taken into account. They include playing
well on the test, improving testing skills, playing well in the contest, and improving
contesting skills. Sportspeople already can and do achieve and acknowledge these
outcomes; however, within the current framework of competition, success in these four areas, as previously noted, is generally ignored or accorded little status. With these four areas of re-emphasis, the reconceptualization of competition as a project designed to show degrees of difference is strengthened.

Warren Fraleigh differentiates between two sets of potential outcomes for a competition: winning and losing and playing well and playing poorly. For Fraleigh (1984), these potential outcomes focus either on the product (winning/losing) or the process (playing well/playing poorly) (pp. 51–55, 62). He argues that the best possible outcome of a game for a contestant or team is winning and playing well, with losing and playing well ranking second (Fraleigh, 1984, p. 67). According to Fraleigh (1984), “when all contestants play well, it is for the good of everyone alike in that it assures (a) the best possible contest, (b) the determination of the true relative abilities of all, and (c) the maximum positive personal satisfaction of all” (p. 67). In other words, the most desirable outcome emerges when opposing parties both play well (see Table 1). For Fraleigh, more desirable contests exist when all participants play well. This analysis suggests that winning holds less value than commonly thought and that excellence and skill in sport are not necessarily tied to competitive success, dichotomously understood.
Kretchmar takes Fraleigh’s analysis of competition a step further by indicating that two separate, but related tasks—testing and contesting—exist in all competitive sport. According to Kretchmar (1975a), tests provide the foundational challenge and the means by which differences between players can be shown. Contests allow players to demonstrate their testing skills in relation to another player.

Tests provide a set of (fairly straightforward) skills to be accomplished. Hitting a baseball well, running quickly, enduring long cycling treks, and accurately throwing a ball all fall under testing skills. These skills can include both basic physical skills and complex tasks. A person can take a test alone and achieve a test score that represents the relative level of excellence one displays in taking that test. When we call players excellent golfers, runners, or basketball players, we are typically referring to their test-taking skills in these various testing domains.

However, Kretchmar also noted, based on MacIntyrian notions of “practices,” that contests offer opportunities to show additional excellences. He argued that it is one thing to play golf well, for example, but another to be an excellent competitor in golf.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Win</th>
<th>Lose</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Play Well</td>
<td>1 (Best possible outcome)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>The better contest (all play well)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Play Poorly</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4 (Worst Possible Outcome)</td>
<td>The lesser contest (all play poorly)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Contesting excellences, in contrast to testing excellences, might include abilities related to:

leading, taking the lead, holding a lead, gambling for a lead, delaying strategically for a reversal late in the contest, intentionally forfeiting a lead, mustering resources that would not be needed just to do well on the test, intentionally and skillfully deceiving an opponent into thinking that a lead has been lost when it has not (Kretchmar, 2003, p. 134).

In other words, Kretchmar concludes that taking the test well and successfully competing in a contest involve distinctive skill sets. With these separate skill sets, athletes must meet different challenges—one type in relationship to the sporting test and the other in relation to their opponent’s progress in the sporting contest, both of which can be done either well or poorly (see Figure 2).

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<tr>
<td>Playing well on test</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Best potential outcome</td>
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<tr>
<td>Playing well in contest</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Playing poorly on test</td>
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<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Playing poorly in contest</td>
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Figure 2: Kretchmar's Addition to Fraleigh's Conception of Competition

Thus, the addition of Kretchmar’s testing and contesting criteria expands Fraleigh’s definitions of valuable competitions. With the testing/contesting distinction in place, athletes can determine how well or poorly they played both in terms of meeting the
challenge of the test and the dynamics of the contest. Kretchmar’s analysis further supports the idea that winners do not deserve to reap all the rewards. Losers can successfully manage the test, even if they do not overcome their opponent. Losers may even do well in both testing and contesting and still fail to secure victory. Likewise, winners can take a test poorly, yet still achieve victory because they face an inferior opponent. Winners can also exhibit poor testing and contesting skills and still scrape out a victory. Broadening the scope of success in athletic events accounts for these various potential outcomes and provides multiple sites for evaluation and varying degrees of success.

In this section, I will further broaden Fraleigh’s and Kretchmar’s conceptions of competition by adding a third element: improvement. This builds on their suggestion that the key criterion of athletic success is the quality of one’s performance, not merely winning or losing. My examination expands their analyses and offers a fuller understanding and description of athletic performances. However, it is not meant to totally eliminate emphasis on winning and losing—competitive success is still important. Instead, it complements the dichotomy of winning and losing by providing other potential outcomes that are readily available in sporting contests.

Perhaps this is best described with an example. Here I will use parallel contests, such as those provided by track and field, golf, and bowling, where the test is external to the competitors and can be completed with or without opponents. I will demonstrate how a lessened focus on zero-sum attitudes toward competition can aid in appreciating
degrees of success. In particular, I will use an example of a track and field contestant running the 100-meter dash:

Sally and Jane race the 100-meter dash. Sally completes the race in 15 seconds, losing to Jane, who runs it in 13 seconds. Unhappy with her personal performance, Sally works hard to improve her sprinting skills. Over the course of the year, Sally celebrates as she runs the 100-meter dash in 14.5 seconds, then 14 seconds, and finally 13.5 seconds. Again, she races Jane. Jane, who achieved a sort of stasis in her sprinting ability, still runs the race in 13 seconds, while Sally finishes closely behind her with a sprint of 13.25 seconds (her personal record). In this example the same competitor clearly won—on two different occasions. Despite her improvement, Sally still lost to Jane in their re-match. However, with a reconceptualization of attitudes toward winning and losing, Sally can more completely describe her competitive outcomes by emphasizing a variety of results that are embedded in these events, results that transcend the singular dichotomously-framed defeat.

Playing Well in the Test

Sally’s performance can be analyzed from the standpoint of how well or poorly she took the test—that is, how fast she ran, independent of the contest. This can be

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7 Although I will not analyze interactive contests (such as basketball, soccer, and football), the same principles still apply to these games. Because interactive contests require that opponents play a role in the creation of the test (for example, a basketball game cannot exist without two teams, whereas a track athlete can run a distance with or without an opponent), an analysis of refocusing attitudes toward improvement and degrees of success would require a more complicated analysis and explanation. However, the result would be similar.
judged in both a relative sense and an absolute sense. In the relative sense, Sally can be said to be playing well based on her own capabilities, genetic endowments, and level of experience. Additionally, Sally can be judged in an absolute sense, how well she ran in comparison to all other women or all other humans. In a relative sense, at least, she achieves a measure of excellence (albeit it one that is potentially small) in terms of the test. In her first race, Sally’s performance is unlikely to be considered playing well. Her time was slow, both from a relative and an absolute standpoint. By the second race with Jane, Sally’s performance could be considered playing well—she ran faster and was able to complete the race in a better time (even though she has not achieved an elite level standard). Additionally, good performances do not require improvement. Though Sally found greater testing success by bettering her time, Jane’s time remains the same. However, by certain criteria, Jane still achieved a form of testing excellence. Finally, playing well does not guarantee winning. Even though Sally lost, she can still celebrate a certain degree of testing excellence.

**Improving in the Test**

In this example, an important mark of success is Sally’s improvement over time. She became a better and faster runner. One of the well-known joys of sport involves the pursuit of excellence, the attempt to “get better.” Players can analyze their performances over time, and take heart when their outcomes improve. Additionally, a significant focus on improvement in the test provides a different means for setting personal goals. Emphasizing an increase in skill level, Sally is concerned with how her sprinting ability
has improved as she continues to practice and evolve her skills, further separating self-improvement from winning. In fact, in the example, Sally improved her time significantly, despite losing to Jane for a second time. If winning were the only outcome that mattered, Sally should seek out only weaker opponents. Instead, she challenges herself with relatively equal (or even slightly better) opponents and is still able to see improvement and celebrate that outcome.

**Playing Well in the Contest**

Although I argue that a reconceptualization of competition involves less emphasis on whether or not an athlete wins or loses, I maintain that the values of competitive excellences remain important. As Kretchmar notes, contests provide unique skills sets and allow for athletes to pursue and display these forms of excellence. So, Sally might play well, but still not execute the competitive skills necessary to win the contest—perhaps Jane is better prepared to perform under pressure and do well when the race calls for it. Additionally, the differences between Sally and Jane’s performances decrease dramatically between the two races and Sally even runs a personal best time. It is possible that running faster than ever before demonstrates a level of competitive skill in Sally—a close contest with a faster (but not too much faster) Jane allows Sally to demonstrate not only her improved running, but also potentially her competitive racing performance.⁸

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⁸ However, it is possible that Sally did not actually improve her contesting abilities. In a contest, like running a race, mere skill improvement (i.e. running faster) may result in winning, even without the development of any competitive excellences.
Possibly Sally “muster[ed] resources” not needed for doing well in the test, leading to her personal best time (Kretchmar, 2003, p. 134).

Looking closely at comparisons between opponents can illustrate this contesting excellence or lack thereof, even though the measurement of it may be difficult. In some cases, it is possible to look to the score to generate this—generally, closer contests may indicate a certain level of competition—a score of 99-1 might illustrate a low level of skill in contesting while a match of 52-48 between two competitors potentially suggests that the losing team’s level of competition was high. However, the score alone cannot tell the full story. Nuanced understandings of competitive success recognize how well (or poorly) an athlete or team displayed contesting skills, such as the ability maintain her lead, continue to fend off advances of the opponent, and employ competitive strategies, among other skills.

**Improving in the Contest**

Narrowing the margin of victory can be the result of a number of factors, including self-improvement coinciding with the opponent’s stasis, a decreased performance by the opponent, or an improvement in contesting skills. In the case of Sally and Jane, both of these factors might have come into play. Sally has seen a great improvement in her racing time. Meanwhile, Jane’s time remains the same. Furthermore, it is possible that Sally’s improvement in the race came from better contesting strategies as well as improved testing capabilities. Perhaps she was better prepared to keep pace with a faster runner or was better able to retain her confidence when Jane gained a few
paces. Sally still lost the race, but narrowing the margin of victory provides a reason for her to celebrate her performance.

It should be noted that while contesting and testing skills and improvement can be conceptually teased apart, in reality, it might be difficult to separate the two. For example, a score of 90-10 may indicate poor testing ability on the part of the loser, poor contesting strategies, or a combination of both. In fact, there are at least 32 logical possibilities that can lead to varied contesting outcomes (i.e. Sally could play well, contest well, have her testing ability stay the same, her contesting abilities improve, and lose, while Jane plays well, contests poorly, diminishes her testing ability, have her contesting abilities stay the same, and win. This is just one example of the numerous possibilities that occur within a sport contest). The potential outcomes are multiple and constantly changing. Though athletes typically exhibit both testing and contesting excellence, success in both is not required. For example, Jane’s victory can possibly be attributed to her contesting skills and/or her testing skills (or Sally’s lack thereof).

The numerous potential outcomes demonstrate the fact that these four areas of emphasis rarely operate independently of one another. Athletes who perform well on the test often compete well. Furthermore, players who experience self-improvement on the test are also likely to improve their contesting abilities when faced with the same or

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9 The 32 potential outcomes were arrived at as follows. Winning and losing give two potential outcomes. When Playing well on the test or playing poorly are added, the number of potential outcomes increases to four. By adding another set of two potential outcomes, playing well in the contest and playing poorly in the contest, the number of potential outcomes increases to eight (4 x 2 = 8). When another set of potential outcomes, improving on the test or declining (or reaching stasis) on the test are included, the number of potential outcomes increases to 16 (8 x 2 = 16). Finally, including the paired outcomes of improving on the contest or declining (or reaching stasis) in the contest increases the number of potential outcomes to 32 (16 x 2 = 32).
similar opponents, and therefore, narrow the competitive deficit or attain a greater number of victories. Despite the difficulty in separating testing and contesting skills, conceptually they remain distinct. Reforms aimed at these four areas refocus the athlete’s attention more explicitly on these varied outcomes, rather than merely deifying victory.

Along with a reconceptualization of winning and losing, expanding the importance of various potential outcomes lessens distorted views of competitive athletics. Instead, sport will have a renewed focus on improvement and achieving testing and contesting excellence. Re-focusing on these outcomes can help athletes shed win-at-all-costs attitudes that permeate college sports and cause many of the problems associated with it. Furthermore, reforming hypercompetitive attitudes can lead to potential reform in other areas. Because winning will not be the only priority for teams and individuals, they can focus on alternate sources for meaning in sport, such as developing personal meaning and enjoying a host of aesthetic benefits. Moreover, when victory is not the highest valued outcome, athletes can develop better relationships with others in sport. Relationships among teammates and between opponents can be expected to improve.

**Exploring Alternate Sources for Meaning in Sport**

If my previous argument is convincing, then winning should no longer take precedence as the only valuable outcome in competitive endeavors. In a reformed model of intercollegiate athletics, alternative sources for meaning can and should enjoy a more prominent place. To be sure, some athletes and casual players already place a great deal of importance on these sources of meaning. However, currently, most athletes within the
dominant system still hold winning as the highest, and often sole, priority. Therefore, these alternate sources for meaning do not receive due attention. In this section, I will focus on four potential alternate sources for meaning: (1) symbolism; (2) challenge and risk (3) optimal experiences; and (4) aesthetic value.

**Meaning through Symbolism**

According to Eleanor Metheny (1965), “We create our man-made forms of movement to make the sense that life makes to us more articulate, and in doing this we enlarge the store of meanings we find in the experience we call life” (p. 21). For Metheny, athletics and other forms of physical movement create and explain the meanings of our actions and foster a unique understanding of the world around us. Meaningful movement is also a profoundly human experience, as she argues, “The wonder of being human is that we have the ability to make motions that do matter to us as human beings” (Metheny, 1965, p. 106, emphasis original). Thus, Metheny calls for seeing movement as a personally meaningful experience—something that tells us about ourselves and tells us about the world around us.

These movements can be meaningful in two senses—both as denotations and connotations. According to Metheny (1965), movements can be described as “‘He is jumping’” which names the action, “for the power of denotation is the power to name” (p. 74). On the other hand, movements can indicate motivation and emotional mood. Thus movement has the power of connotation and becomes a symbolic form (Metheny, 1965, p. 174). Sport is ripe with symbolic potential—for indications of hope, tragedy,
limitation, power, grace, serendipity, and so much more. This symbolism is not necessarily tied to winning though competitive success and failure carry considerable potential for symbolic understanding. Thus, movement can be personally meaningful both in victory and defeat. Symbolic meaning in movement offers an alternate reason for participating in sport by helping athletes gain a richer and fuller picture of themselves as embodied beings, of the world as a place in which to move skillfully, and of relationships between themselves and their surroundings.

As noted above, the sort of meaning found in sport is virtually limitless. Not only can it provide a way for sportspeople to learn more about the world and its characteristics, but sport can be symbolic of personal narratives. As MacIntyre argued, we learn of ourselves in the roles we play and the coherent narratives that are shaped by those roles. One might identify as a mother, daughter, professor, and as a runner. One might see oneself as a brother, son, student and as a soccer player. This self-identification conveys important personal characteristics and values. If sports can focus on developing this personal meaning, rather than serving merely as a place where one can collect victories, then sport and its associated symbolism can become accessible and valuable to a larger segment of the population. This symbolism adds unique value to sport, allowing athletes to enhance their self-identity and enrich personal meaning.

Sportspeople often find meaning in the relationship between their personal history and athletics. For some, sport symbolizes bonds with others, an escape from suffering, or a place to find success. Sportswriter Rick Reilly, in recalling his childhood with an alcoholic father, acknowledges that he was “raised by sports” (Reilly, 2014, para. 9). He
tackles the meanings associated with sport, saying, “Never let anyone tell you sports doesn't matter” and gives examples like “It's your grandfather and you and the way a Sunday Bears game bonds you like Super Glue” (Reilly, 2014, para. 15). Reilly recognizes the importance of sport not only for his own particular history, but also for the personal narratives of many men and women.

Furthermore, sport may symbolize an escape from hardship, both literally and figuratively. For Arkansas State hurdler Sharika Nelvis, track and field was about more than winning races—it offered her an opportunity to receive an education and relief from her lifelong struggles. After losing both parents by the age of seven, Nelvis spent most of her childhood facing instability, constantly moving from home to home. With track and field, she “found a place that felt like home should be” (Jennings, 2014, para. 28). For Nelvis, sport took on new meaning; though victory likely was important in the development of meaning for Nelvis, she valued track and field in ways that transcended winning and losing. In sport, she found stability.

Meaning and symbolism in sport give it greater depth. Athletics do not only denote specific knowledge (i.e. “She made a jump shot”) but also serve to connote emotions, convey meaning, generate personal narratives, and develop personal histories. These powerful meanings help us communicate and remind us of our own stories. Because of this, symbolism and meaning provide alternate values in sporting competitions.
Meaning through Challenge and Risk

Metheny notes that meaningful movement is profoundly human. In other ways, as some sport philosophers note, sport, by providing both challenge and risk, can help athletes develop a better sense of self and human possibility. Following transcendental philosophers, such as Thoreau, Anderson sees sport as an activity that can provide transactional opportunities, such as possibility, creativity, and freedom. Through movement, people interact with the world around them. Anderson (2001) argues that movement and sport provide possible “avenues for humanizing, for self-recovery and ‘refreshment’” (p. 141). In the end, the importance of movement can create a good life by opening “transformative possibilities,” such as power, freedom, peace, and beauty—“traits of a life worth living” (D. Anderson, 2001, p. 145). In other words, for Anderson (2001), the discovery of numerous possibilities and potential through sport creates a meaningful life and allows one to “become fully human” (p. 145).

Different types of sports may foster the discovery of human potential in different ways. Following Anderson, Hochstetler and Hopsicker (2012) argue that endurance sport provides potentially humanizing and meaningful transactions, claiming, “Through sport and physical activity, we set aside, at least temporarily, the restlessness of everyday life and engage in activities which provide the potential for sustaining meaning and significance” (p. 119). They focus primarily on strenuous endurances sports—cycling and running—contending that the “Dedication and skill development” associated with these sports “afford[s] the opportunity to experience freedom and human agency” (Hochstetler & Hopsicker, 2012, p. 122). For Hochstetler and Hopsicker (2012), endurance sport
provides opportunities for growth and “human flourishing” (pp. 124, 132). By choosing challenging tasks, and laying the groundwork for completing them—planning routes, waking early, completing the run/ride, maintaining core strength and flexibility—runners and cyclists take part in “daily actions [that] provide the context for growth to flourish” (Hochstetler & Hopsicker, 2012, p. 124). Therefore, along with Anderson, Hochstetler and Hopsicker maintain that movement and sport are activities that allow humans to recognize their full potential and discover a wealth of possibilities.

Other sport philosophers recognize the power for human flourishing in risky sport. For example, Howe (2008) analyzes what she calls “remote sports,” where athletes are separated by distance, from typical sport structures, and from quick emergency response and escape (p. 2). She argues that the risks inherent in remote sport enhance the possibility for gaining a better understanding of the self. Howe (2008) contends that risky, remote sport provides the “opportunity for heightened testing of one’s ability and character, and ultimately an affirmation of one’s self” (p. 7). Because remote sport requires considerable distance from the amenities of modern civilization (including easy access to emergency rescue in potentially fatal accidents), it “clarifies one’s personal self. One then gains knowledge of self both in one’s limits and in one’s connections” (Howe, 2008, p. 13, emphasis original). In other words, remote sport helps the athlete expand the knowledge of the self and aids in finding the limits of human potentiality.

Russell also sees the value of risky sport. For him, dangerous sport is not necessarily remote, but involves significant risk to human functioning (Russell, 2005, p. 3). He argues that dangerous sport, similar to Howe’s remote sport, provides a unique
opportunity for the development of personal knowledge and satisfaction. Russell (2005) claims, that “participating in dangerous sport […] can incorporate a challenge to capacities for judgment and choice that involves all of ourselves—our body, will, emotions, and ingenuity—under conditions of physical duress and danger at the limits of our being” (p. 14, emphasis original). Like Howe, Russell sees the risk inherent to dangerous sport as bringing about further knowledge of human limits and potential. By focusing on dangerous and remote sport, Howe and Russell demonstrate that developing an understanding of human limits can enhance the meaning of sport. It can bring about a greater understanding of the self and of what it means to be human.

While Anderson, Hochstetler and Hopsicker, Howe, and Russell look specifically at different types of sports, they all illuminate the possibility that sport opens up the opportunity to understand and increase human potential. Importantly, all of them draw primarily from testing elements of sport, not sporting contests. It is the worthy test that allows athletes to search for their embodied limits, gain knowledge about their skills and humanity, and develop creative and free movements. These test-related journeys provide worthy alternate values for competitive athletes. Though these meanings and values are not necessarily divorced from competitive objectives, pursuing the limits of human potential can actively engage athletes and influence their performance. Attempting movements out of creativity, an increased sense of freedom, or just to see if one can accomplish the task, allows for sportspeople to transcend the values of winning and losing. Instead, athletes can develop a sense of meaning and understanding of the self through movement, regardless of the outcome, or even the presence, of a contest.
Meaning through Optimal Experiences

In addition to providing meaning through symbolism and challenge, athletics also offers potentially meaningful encounters by serving as a site for optimal experiences. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1990) describes these optimal or extraordinary experiences as “flow,” a quality of self-world interaction that provides “a sense of discovery, a creative feeling of transporting the person into a new reality” (p. 74). Furthermore, flow allows the transformation of the self “by making it more complex” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, p. 74). These flow experiences result from a balance between skill and challenge, where activities are neither too challenging nor too easy for the participant’s particular level of competence. Experiences that are too difficult result in anxiety while activities that are too easy cause boredom (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, p. 74). For Csikszentmihalyi, sport can serve as a potential area to strike a balance between the two and achieve flow.

Athletes often search for flow experiences. According to Jackson and Csikszentmihalyi (1999), “the crux of sport is the quality of experience” where athletes want to participate “for no other reason than to be a part of it” (p. 4, emphasis original). The growth and discovery fostered by flow experiences proves attractive to athletes. Jackson and Czikszentmihalyi’s analysis, once again, focuses primarily on testing abilities, since the testing challenges confronted by athletes often promote the optimal balance if skill and challenge. It is for this reason that participation in sport potentially provides these flow experiences. Contesting, while important for the experience of sport, is less likely to provide flow opportunities because it relies heavily on the skills and abilities of an opponent. The variable and unpredictable challenges provided by
opponents, in other words, renders contests less reliable vehicles for optimal experience. Flow experiences, based on testing challenges, provide an alternate source of meaning by potentially extending to winner and loser alike. This is the case because flow does not require that participants win; it only requires that they experience achievement in the face of a proper balance between challenge and skill. Losers can still attain optimal experiences. With flow, the balance between skill and challenge takes precedence over attempting to achieve victory.

**Meaning through Aesthetic Value**

Although many athletes recognize that sport provides aesthetic value, in a reformed model this value deserves a prominent place as a source of meaning. Aesthetic value is not incompatible with a level of competition. In fact, attempting to win and attaining a certain level of mastery are often key elements for beautiful and dramatic sport. However, as an alternate value, aesthetics can supersede the attention placed on winning. In this section, I will demonstrate two ways that aesthetics can serve as a significant source of meaning: (1) by developing an appreciation for graceful, beautiful, and artful movement and (2) by recognizing the dramatic elements of a sport contest.

In an attempt to draw meaning from aesthetic, athletic movements, some sport philosophers claim that sport is a form of art. Jan Boxill (1984) argues that “a well-played game that is aesthetically pleasing is often the primary aim and is preferred to winning ‘at all costs’” (p. 41). However, the artful athlete must be one who focuses on the development of her skills. For Boxill, the well-played game is both beautiful and skillful.
She claims, “A performance or work cannot be beautiful unless the basics are mastered” (J. M. Boxill, 1984, p. 46). Boxill (1984) concludes that sport is an art form because “the essential features of sport and art are compatible” (p. 46). However, not all sport philosophers agree with Boxill’s claim that sport is art. David Best denies that sport is art, though he clearly articulates that it does have aesthetic value. For him, “Superb aesthetically, sport can undoubtedly be. Why not judge sport by its own standards, including aesthetic standards?” (Best, 1985, p. 39).

Despite the disagreement between Boxill and Best about whether sport qualifies as art, they both acknowledge an important fact: aesthetic qualities are present within athletics. A beautiful jump shot or perfect pass can be as aesthetically pleasing and as valuable as a stunning painting or striking photograph. Admiring the grace and beauty of sport can lead to a search for greater meaning with athletic movements. Cordner (2003) asserts that graceful movement has a “sensuous immediacy” but that its power to move us as it does owes to this meaning that it discloses” (p. 132). For Cordner, beautiful and graceful movements are contextualized, by the skill in the movement form. In other words, while many people do not understand or appreciate weight-lifting, the graceful movements of a professional weight lifter appeal to us because they convey a broader meaning. According to Cordner (2003), the movements of the weight lifter are “exemplifying an easy presence of at-home-ness in the world” (p. 139). Aesthetically pleasing movement indicates a level of comfort and confidence in oneself. We are attracted to the beautiful movement because it provides a sort of meaning about the

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10 For an in-depth discussion of the sport as art debate, see Elcombe (2012)
world, not necessarily because we enjoy the specific movement form (Cordner, 2003, p. 139).

Furthermore, the meaningfulness of sport might arise because aesthetics are a key element to successful athletics. Elcombe (2012) follows Dewey’s pragmatic aesthetics in arguing that sport, like other social practices, relies on aesthetics. This view of aesthetics paints it as “the quality of experience humans (as ‘live creatures’) derive through transactions with the worlds they ‘inhabit’” (Elcombe, 2012, p. 206, emphasis original). Elcombe (2012) argues that aesthetic sport experiences are not limited to beautiful, graceful movements, but extend to “a ‘world of meaning’ constructed by humans” (p. 208). In other words, sport appeals to us as an embodied aesthetic experience rooted in social practices. Elcombe (2012) concludes that “Sport, like all humanly constructed social practices, is at its core aesthetic—we are drawn to it because of its ability to deepen the meaningfulness of our experience, to engage us fully and illuminate our embodied possibilities and limitations” (p. 214). In other words, the deeply human search for meaning in sport stems from the aesthetic nature of movement.

Thus, athletes can look to aesthetics to promote and create meaningful sport. The physical test involved in sport allows athletes to develop skillful, yet beautiful and graceful movements. Instead of focusing on victory (and only on the contesting elements), athletes can increase the aesthetic quality of sport movements, thus gaining broader meaning for both themselves and spectators. Therefore, searching for meaning through an aesthetic lens proves a worthwhile alternate value in sport.
Contesting also provides a resource for aesthetic value. Dramatic tension, arising, in part, from the unknown outcome of competition, can also serve as a viable alternate value in sport.\(^{11}\) Drama and tension are abundantly present in athletic games (Kaelin, 1979, p. 329). However, dramatic moments are not entirely separated from the will to win or the development of skills. For Kaelin (1979), “the desire to win is never aesthetically irrelevant” (p. 328). Despite this, securing victory does not always determine the aesthetic value of a sport.\(^{12}\) In fact, he urges coaches to go for the beautiful goal, even if it risks victory. Kaelin (1979) hopes that coaches will put their reputations on the line by “going for the well-played game” (p. 331). For him, the “well-played game” involves dramatic tension, where the outcome is in question until the very end of the contest. Instead of focusing on winning at all costs, coaches and players might make risky plays that increase the drama and tension, and are therefore motivated by aesthetics, even if these risks ultimately cause the player or team to lose.

Buckley (2006) also demonstrates the importance of drama in sport by comparing athletic performances to Aristotelian dramatic principles (p. 21). For Buckley (2006), sport follows some of the traditional characteristics of dramatic theater: the athletes are united by the rules, just as actors are united by a script; sports can resemble and instruct “life issues” such as morality, just as plays can denote similar “life issues;” and both theater and contests require a level of uncertainty (though this uncertainty may be more

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\(^{11}\) To be sure, dramatic tension can develop from testing abilities. Meeting the challenge of the test may be so difficult that the question of whether or not the athlete completes it is dramatic. For example, the daredevil Nik Wallenda walked on a tightrope across both Niagara Falls and the Grand Canyon. While he did not meet any contesting challenges, the uncertainty of his ability to safely complete these feats was the source of dramatic tension.

\(^{12}\) However, the aesthetic value of sport may translate into victory in certain sports, where judges evaluate performances, in part, along aesthetic criteria (i.e. gymnastics, diving, and figure skating).
profound in sport, as it is impossible to know the outcome before the game is finished) (pp. 25–28). Although sport and drama have many similarities, Buckley does not contend that sport is a form of theater, but rather that sport has dramatic elements. Competitive games always have drama—even if it is not the drama the athletes hope for (for example, Buckley notes that Mallory and Irvine’s ill-fated climb of Mount Everest was dramatic, though tragic, as they both died during their attempt) (Buckley, 2006, p. 33).

Kaelin and Buckley indicate the importance of drama to sport and aesthetics. Instead of relentlessly pursuing mere victory, coaches and athletes can attempt to build dramatic tension. Typically, the relative contesting skills of the opponents can lead to this quality. Constantly changing possessions, continuously alternating the lead, and consistently well-matched players can contribute to an interesting narrative arc. The fact that the reactions of the players and the outcome of the competition are unknown leads to increased drama. In this sense, the contesting elements of sport act as a source of dramatic tension.

Sport can serve as a site for aesthetic meaning by appealing to the beautiful, graceful movements found in athletics and by creating interesting dramatic tension. Instead of focusing on winning at all costs, athletes can focus on aesthetics as a source of meaning. Aesthetically-minded athletes can focus on the joy of beauty and drama found in sport, rather than merely attempting to accumulate victories.

These four alternate sources for meaning in sport are not exhaustive. A number of additional values can be found in high quality sporting experiences. However, these four sites for alternate meaning illustrate the fact that sportspeople can find numerous reasons
for participating in competitive sport. They can search for personal meaning, search for the limits of human potential, discover optimal experiences, and find aesthetic pleasure, among other values. When winning at all costs and hypercompetitive attitudes no longer dominate the value system of sport, other areas of significance can take on greater importance. This should affect the way that athletes act in sport and how they treat others who participate.

**Expanding Interpersonal Relationships in Sport**

If athletes and coaches no longer see winning as the primary and only aim of participating in sport, relationships with others, both teammates and opponents, can be transformed for the better. Instead of seeing opponents as enemies, at worst or facilitators, at best, athletes can see others as companions in the test and even as friends (Hyland, 1978). Furthermore, players can see their teammates in a different light. While teammates generally must have a good working relationship, a level of trust, and a degree of respect in order to be successful, often athletes see their compatriots as mere instruments and regard them as distractions from personal merit. By decreasing the emphasis on accumulating victories, teammates can develop friendships built on mutuality, shared values, trust, and loyalty.
Relationships with Opponents

When athletes focus mainly on winning games, they often see opponents as obstacles to overcome or as an enemy. The other person or team stands in the way of their goal—namely, victory. According to Fraleigh (1984), when opponents are seen as obstacles, they stand between the athlete and his or her goal and are “‘at once feared and needed’” (p. 84). In these cases, competition “requires me to eliminate the obstacle” (Fraleigh, 1984, p. 84). For Fraleigh (1984), this is problematic because the “other” is viewed negatively and as a means to achieving goals (p. 86). Demonizing the opponent as an enemy not only constitutes a moral wrong, but also limits the range of possibilities provided by the opponent. As enemies, competitors only serve as an obstacle to overcome. As facilitators, opponents not only provide an obstacle, but also help to create the contest and motivate their counterpart toward success. In short, opponents need not and should not be seen as enemies.

Fraleigh argues that through mutual cooperation, opponents facilitate the competition. In this vein, seeing opponents as facilitators allows for a level of respect to develop and for opponents to be both a means and an end (Fraleigh, 1984, p. 86). According to Fraleigh, seeing the opponent as a facilitator is “for the good of everyone alike” for a number of reasons. First, the hindrance provided by the opponent is maintained as the “hindrance for the mutual pursuit of the goal.” Secondly, excellence still occurs and is likely contingent upon seeing athletes as facilitators. Without an opponent playing good defense, the athlete cannot fully show his or her offensive moves. Third, both competitors can attempt to achieve their best when they see each other as
facilitators. Fourth, seeing the opponent as a facilitator promotes “sweet tension.” And, finally, this viewpoint “helps make the sports contest a human event wherein the mutual respect and regard of opponents is evident” (Fraleigh, 1984, pp. 89–91).

The obligation to the other is also influence by parallel and interactive tests and contests. In a parallel sport (such as track and field or swimming), opponents do not have a testing obligation to the other participants. The presence of others does not impact the ability of the other to complete the test. However, the contesting obligations are still present in these parallel contests. Both Sally and Jane have the ability to complete the test (running 100 meters), regardless of the presence of the other. However, the presence of Jane influences Sally’s running in the context of the contest. Jane (as per the example) is a faster runner than Sally, therefore her presence may cause Sally to run faster in order to keep up (or the opposite may be true. Perhaps Jane’s superior ability discourages Sally and she actually runs slower than possible). Thus, in parallel competitions, athletes have only contesting obligations.

On the other hand, interactive contests (such as those provided by basketball and soccer) require a double obligation from opponents—they are a key element of both the test and the contest. Without an opponent, the full test of basketball does not exist. The key elements of the game require the presence of another person. Dribbling a ball up and down a court and shooting alone bears only a slight resemblance to a basketball game.  

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13 The skills associated with basketball (shooting, dribbling, etc.) surely can provide parallel contests (i.e. a foul shooting contest). However, while these parallel contests use the skills associated with basketball, they are not basketball per se.
Similarly, basketball players depend on their opponents for the creation of the contest. Without an opponent, basketball players have no one to attempt to out-score.

In both parallel and interactive contests, opponents also serve as an important motivator. Though not necessarily through overt means (i.e. giving instructions to improve swing to one another), opponents can tacitly inspire stronger performances from one another. By playing against a reasonably talented opponent, especially one matched in skill level, athletes may reach higher potential excellence than in non-competitive scenarios. Better contests occur because of the presence and motivation of another player. Athletes may hit a golf ball better or run faster when they are attempting to do it better than someone else.

On these descriptions of opponents as facilitators, competitors are viewed as a means to an end, as instrumentally valuable. However, relationships between opponents can take on a deeper meaning and move toward recognizing competitive others as human, not as instruments but as ends in themselves. One way these deeper relationships occur is through empathy. There is something unique about sport, with its shared struggles and difficulties, that makes it a prime source of deep and intimate relationships. Watching others grapple with similar problems as oneself can invites empathy among opponents. Opponents can also appreciate the other’s skills, talents, and difficulties inherent in striving toward excellence. Sharing a similar struggle to develop and improve the contesting and testing skills necessary for success in a sport can build bonds. These relationships may deepen when opponents meet often, forming closer ties by watching each other play frequently and by responding to the skills and strategies of their
opponents regularly. Through empathy and shared striving, opponents can recognize each other at a human level, as more than a means, as people who face the same difficulties, celebrate similar achievements, and relish comparable joys.

Drew Hyland (1978) takes the opponent relationship to another level, arguing that competition can inspire friendship. For him, competition and friendship have a teleological relationship where “the highest version of competition is as friendship” (Hyland, 1978, p. 35). He even goes as far as to make a normative claim: “we ought to strive at all times to let our competitive play be a mode of friendship” (Hyland, 1978, p. 35, emphasis original). He suggests that we should see our competitors as something more than merely a facilitator. Opponents do not only serve to aid in creating the test and the contest—they form relational bonds by participating in the same project. For Hyland (1978), competition is a “mutual striving” where “it is a questioning of each other together, a striving together” (p. 34, emphasis original).

Hyland is not the only one to see competition as a mutual striving. Simon (2010) defines lusory competition as a “mutual quest for excellence through challenge” (p. 27). For Simon and Hyland, the other is a necessary part of the contest. Without this cooperation, the competition would not exist. But, the opponent does not exist merely to create the contest. Instead, the togetherness and mutuality inspired by competition allow both opponents to strive to new excellences perhaps unattainable without the other. Opponents can push each other to their limits so that they can achieve the highest levels of excellence possible to them. In short, the mutuality and friendship associated with competition makes not only for better contests, but for better players.
Opponents can also enter relationships based on mutuality and respect. According to Kretchmar (1975b), following Buber’s discussion of the “I-Thou” relationship, “Frequently a kind of fraternity among opponents in a single sport develops” (p. 23). Opponents share a test and share in attempting to overcome the obstacles of the test. For example, cagers playing basketball against one another share in their attempts to put a ball through a hoop. Though they actively attempt to prevent the other from that goal, these basketball players maintain a relationship that relies on a mutual understanding of the rules and goals of the game. This illustrates Kretchmar’s (1975b) point that “A common ‘adversary’ is identified as the conditions of the test and not only as fellow athletes...A problem is shared” (p. 23). For Kretchmar, this relationship among opponents challenges the nature of a successful sport contest. Instead of counting victory as the only means to assess the success of a contest, the mutuality and dialogue shared by opponents produces a profoundly human interaction (Kretchmar, 1975b, p. 27).

These analyses indicate that mutuality and friendship should reign supreme in opponent relationships. This occurs through acting as facilitators and as friends. It inspires both good contests and respect for others as persons. This new focus allows for the recognition of testing families—where players in the same sport identify with one another and hold similar values. Soccer players, whether they are teammates or opponents, hold similar beliefs and goals and share an understanding of the game. Testing families draw ties across competition and help improve relationships among players.
When the importance of winning is de-emphasized, treating opponents in this way becomes possible. No longer are athletes solely attempting to win. With a reconceptualization of outcomes and with an emphasis on alternative values, the treatment of opponents can also change. Respect and friendship can be key elements, while athletes no longer look at their opponents as enemies and instead see them as comrades within a testing family.

**Relationships with Teammates**

In some ways, issues surrounding relationships with teammates involve similar problems as those found in relationships with opponents. Seeing teammates as instruments for individual success poses the same problems as seeing opponents merely as facilitators. Though they are necessary to create the contest, seeing them as facilitators, in some ways, relegates them to a merely instrumental status, just as it does when dealing with opponents. However, relationships with teammates necessarily include open communication and trust in order to be successful in sport (Shogan, 1999, p. 81). A lack of respect toward persons does not manifest as deeply when dealing with teammates, as their success is often shared with the team. Furthermore, developing friendships with teammates seems more natural and is often a result of continual mutual cooperation.

On the other hand, teammate relationships face unique challenges. Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swindler, and Tipton (2008) argue that individualism has permeated

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14 Because teammates are not present in individual sports, these remarks may not be widely applicable beyond team sports.
Western culture and creates a number of problems. When individualism carries into sport, it can manifest as the specific player putting his or her needs above those of the rest of the team. For those that act this way, personal ambitions trump team goals and the success of the person is more important than the success of the entire team. Believing that one’s own goals hold a higher importance than those of others and of the team demonstrates a level of selfishness that allows an athlete to see his or her teammates as instrumental—as merely a means to an end. Without their teammates, athletes might not be able to accomplish these goals, but they do not demonstrate their appreciation through respecting them as persons.

Eliminating this individualism, at least to some extent, can help relieve the problems associated with placing the self above others. Therefore, a greater emphasis can be placed on the goals of the team, on respect for others, and loyalty toward teammates. Instead of narrowly focusing on the self, mitigating individualist attitudes can help to remove the over-emphasis on personal goals and renew the emphasis on the team. Thus, reformed models of sport might emphasize different skills (for example, overly stylized moves toward the basket would have less value than excellent passing skills and teamwork).

Gréhaigne’s (2011) analysis of collective sport additionally follows an elimination of excessive individualism from athletics. Following the work of Sartre, Gréhaigne (2011) argues that a team relies on a differentiation of function among team members (p. 37). Team members cannot all perform the same tasks; they must take on complementary roles in order to function well. Thus, teams are cohesive groups with a
sort of unity. They are tied together not only by shared experiences, but because members take a “vow” which allows the group to “assert itself as permanent, and therefore objectivizes itself” (Gréhaigne, 2011, p. 41). Therefore, teammates not only share past experiences of overcoming challenges and obstacles, but are united in efforts to continue to work together in attempts to tackle new objectives. Teammates rely on one another, as they have differentiated their skills and functions, to achieve their goals. Thus, relationships among teammates must be based on strong, committed relationships with one another.

A reformed sport necessarily requires that the nature of interpersonal relationships change. When winning is no longer the only thing that matters, athletes can alter their attitudes toward both opponents and teammates. This also helps to build respect, loyalty, closeness, and friendship among competitors and fellow teammates. Because the focus is on the common ground of the testing family and on the fact that athletes enjoy mutual benefits by treating each other humanely, they can develop richer and deeper relationships.

Coaching as a Potential Site for Reform Implementation

The reforms presented in this chapter are primarily conceptual and philosophic. One way that these theoretical reforms can translate to good sporting practices is through coaching principles. While winning can still remain a primary value in sport, various potential outcomes, multiple values, and strong interpersonal relationships can be promoted by coaches. A new model of sport that moves away from the reductionism and
dualism of the current model, would emphasize quality of play, degrees of success, various types of achievement, improvement, other sources of meaning, and the like which are generally ignored and accorded limited value in the assessment of competitive outcomes.

One way that coaching principles can lead to better sporting practices is by altering how athletes view winning, while also maintaining it as an important value. “Coaching for winning” includes encouraging varying degrees of success. In dualistic conceptualizations, as noted earlier, outcomes are decided on a zero-sum basis. From this standpoint, dichotomous winning occurs at the 51-49 cut point. If Team A scores 51 points, they win, just as much as if they scored 52, 60, or even 90. In the same vein, if Team B scores 49 points, they lose, in the same way that they would have lost if they had scored 48, 40, or even 10. This mathematical model is compelling but insufficient.

In “coaching for winning,” coaches will encourage their players to do two things: (1) honor the traditional model by attempting to win, in a dichotomous sense and (2) honor a new holistic model by getting as much winning into the outcome as possible. This balance between two notions of winning shifts the focus from a dualistic and reductionistic understanding of victory to a broader, more encompassing interpretation of competition and attendant achievements.

As noted, the first goal in “coaching for winning” falls in line with the traditional model. Essentially, this aim suggests that winning—getting to 51 (or higher)—represents a significant and valuable outcome. As argued earlier in this chapter, testing and contesting provide two, distinct sets of skills. Winning, in this dualistic sense, places an
emphasis on contesting excellence. Getting to that dichotomous win continues to provide a meaningful outcome.

However, secondly, in “coaching for winning” players are encouraged to achieve “as much winning as possible.” This takes the zero-sum interpretation of competition a step beyond dualistic understandings of winning and losing. Instead of focusing on just getting to the cut point of 51, and celebrating as if they reached 100, coaches should encourage their athletes to strive for the maximal amount of winning possible. Athletes, then, are encouraged to view winning in terms of degrees of success, not only achieving the 51-49 cut point. In this way, getting to 51 is still valuable—it includes “more winning” than only getting to 15, and 40 includes “more winning” than 15. But none of these achievements is as significant as getting to 85, 90, or, if it is even possible, 100.

Coaches should acknowledge the amount of winning achieved when their team loses. Non-victors still experience some amount of winning, whether it is 49 or 15. It may be especially important for coaches to celebrate improvements in the amount of winning gained. For example, if a team loses 65-35, they experienced only 35% of winning—but if they lost to the same team 80-20 previously, they achieved 15% more winning in the latter contest. This significant improvement is a success—gaining more winning is meaningful and a step toward the overarching goal of getting to the ideal of 100%.

Emphasizing both dichotomous winning and degrees of success allows coaches to reframe competition as a two-part challenge. When a victory is seen as pure accomplishment and a defeat as pure failure, degrees of success do not matter. However, as noted by Herrigel (1999) and Richardson (2012), contests can be portrayed as
challenges with outcomes that are a potential blend of achievement and failure, where athletes fall along a spectrum between these two poles. “Coaching for winning,” then, promotes a sharp focus on victory alongside the degrees of difference that occur in a contest, regardless of victory or defeat. This strategy allows coaches to utilize broader motivations. Instead of motivating players only through dualistic understandings of loving victory and fearing defeat, coaches can teach to loving the mixtures of more winning and disliking the mixtures with more losing.

While “coaching for winning” places importance on winning in a way that celebrates both dualistic and non-dualistic notions of success, it also supports the positive values associated with the multiple outcomes and meanings present in contesting challenges. Hegemonic masculinity fails to account for these outcomes, or at most downplays their significance. One such outcome is improvement of either testing or contesting abilities. Instead, this stereotypically masculine coaching style recognizes virtually nothing short of victory as a positive meaningful outcome. The rules of hegemonic masculinity dictate that athletes either win or endure all other supposedly worthless (or nearly worthless) outcomes.

“Coaching for winning,” then, still encourages coaches to put much of their focus on the outcome of the contest, while also reinforcing the idea that coaches should emphasize other aspects of sport performance, such as improvement and alternate values. Fraleigh (1984) and Kretchmar (1975a) illustrate multiple outcomes in sport competitions—including testing and contesting well or poorly, improving testing and contesting skills, in addition to winning or losing. In this sense, these outcomes can all be
the result of attempting to win or lose. As with highlighting degrees of difference, looking at multiple outcomes of testing and contesting allows athletes to find various kinds of success.15

“Coaching for winning” also entails emphasizing the multiple sources for meaning available in sporting contests. Symbolic meaning (Metheny, 1965), challenge and risk (D. Anderson, 2001; Hochstetler & Hopsicker, 2012; Howe, 2008; Russell, 2005), optimal experiences (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Jackson & Csikszentmihalyi, 1999) and aesthetic value (Best, 1985; J. M. Boxill, 1984; Buckley, 2006; Cordner, 2003; Elcombe, 2012; Kaelin, 1979) are all potential areas for meaning that exist within competitive sport. To motivate players, especially those with an aversion to competition, coaches may choose to stress these associated values. In this way, winners and losers alike can reap rewards associated with meaningful symbolism, with overcoming challenge and risk, with discovering optimal experiences, and with finding aesthetic value. Just as coaches can frame achievement with degrees of success and multiple outcomes instead of as merely a dichotomy between winning and losing, they too can highlight these alternate sites for meaning.

A second coaching principle that implements the reforms from this chapter can be noted as “coaching for community,” a strategy that aims to build strong bonds among both opponents and teammates. With hegemonic masculinity as the central principle,

15 One way that coaches may encourage playing well and improving, alongside contesting well and victory is to set a variety of realistic goals for their players. These goals may include accomplishing certain tasks—make a particular percentage of shots taken, run a specific time—that is, tasks that are related to the testing aspects of the game. Coaches may also suggest contesting goals, such as scoring a certain number of points or reducing the losing margin from a previous contest. The realistic goals may also include asking players to complete certain tasks (linked to both testing and contesting) better than they had in the past.
goals and values associated with community are superseded by hypercompetitive attitudes and a singular focus on winning. As noted previously, the hegemonic, masculine model of sport regards opponents as obstacles, even as enemies. The goal in this version of sport, much like war, is to overcome the obstacle and defeat the enemy. Victory comes at the full expense of the loser. At best, opponents are necessary means to one’s own ends of achieving victory. As a mere means, opponents can be dehumanized as the “other.” In some levels of male-dominated sport, particularly in commercially oriented venues, fraternizing with the enemy is discouraged and minimal levels of decency and collegiality are the norm.

Hegemonic masculinity also dehumanizes teammates. When winning is the sole priority, teammates are seen as a means to that end. Teammates are merely a way to aid in winning (or, contribute to losing). They are regarded as tools in the pursuit of victory, not as ends in themselves.

Therefore, a second alteration to coach’s behavior comes in the form of fostering these community-building goals by helping to grow interpersonal relationships among teammates and between opponents. As Bellah et al. (2008) argued, much of American culture focuses excessively on the individual, diminishing the role of the group and community. This section will tackle interpersonal relationships on both the teammate and opponent level. Building close bonds among teammates helps to create a community and to achieve competitive success. Seeing the value in opponents as friends and members of a similar community helps to humanize the opposition and build friendships with them.
In “coaching for community” serving as an opponent is compatible with mutual facilitation and friendship. As noted, opponents can be seen as facilitators, who not only stand in the way of the other’s progress and but also help to motivate the other toward increased skill development, as noted by Fraleigh. Good players can motivate others to succeed and draw out improvements. For example, in a race, a runner may cross the finish line faster because she has a challenging competitor—even if she still loses (similar to the case of Sally and Jane). Good facilitators can motivate good performances. They spur improvement and excellence.

Competitors, in addition to mutually facilitating contests, can also be or become friends. Hyland (1978, 1985) argues that competitive play should, at least in part, be focused on building friendships. The opponent-as-enemy model of sport is not logically required. This is so because one can commit to a contest and an attempt to win with a friend just as much as with a stranger or an enemy. In fact the agreements that go into competition—such as following the same rules—are more likely to be honored among those who like and respect one another than those who have no relationship (or a negative one) with the opponent.

In terms of teammates, two foundations for unity exist—the test and contest. In some instances, community building can come from emphasizing cooperation in the face of competition. Facing a common enemy can promote bonding among teammates. Alternately, the test might also be employed to build community. What I am calling “coaching for community” then might be best conceived as a complement to team building through contesting. Unification might be found through shared dedication to the
test, by recognizing their common membership in testing families. In these testing families, teammates acknowledge and celebrate excellent skills in part because they share common testing values. They are bound, not only by their striving to beat their opponents, but also by the fact that they are all attempting to become better golfers, runners, or basketball players. While opponents and contesting objectives provide one resource for community, the test provides another one. Of course, this logic applies to opponents as well. They too belong to the same testing family. Teammates and opponents have committed themselves to seek excellence in the face of a challenging test, like golf. So both teammates and opponents might agree with golf devotee Joseph Amato who wrote, “golf beats us all.”

To create these bonds among opponents and teammates, “coaching for community” can employ a few additional strategies. In building relationships between opponents, coaches may attempt to combat the minimalistic sportsmanship often present in competitive sport. While many people advocate for good sportsmanship to include fair play, personal honor (Sessions, 2004), a commitment to shared values (Arnold, 1984), an extension of the play spirit (Feezell, 1986), and increasing the pleasure of sport (Keating, 2007), being a good sport today does not necessarily promote community or fellow feeling. In reality, “good” sportsmanship is often illustrated by opponents cursorily shaking hands (or in many cases, exchanging high-fives) at the end of the contest. Instead of these superficial exchanges, which do not help create strong unity, “coaching for community” encourages players to do more than shake hands or otherwise do nothing to acknowledge the importance of one another. Possibly, they can engage in post-game
conversations or exchange heartier congratulations, among other generous, sportsman-like behaviors.16

In terms of coaching, it might also make sense to attempt to increase the number of women head coaches. Under the male hegemonic model of sport men are often regarded as the better coaches. The preference for male coaches in this prevalent model is demonstrated by the fact that, since the takeover of women’s sport by the male-dominated organizations like the NCAA, men hold the majority of coaching positions for most women’s sports. In fact, following the passage of Title IX in 1972, the number of women in head coaching positions has decreased. In 1972, over 90% of women’s teams were coached by females (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014, p. 18). By 2014, the numbers show a sharp decline. In Division I, only 43.4% of women’s teams were coached by women, with similar proportions in Divisions II (36.4%) and III (47.3%) (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014, p. 21). The loss of positions for female coaches in women’s sport is not offset by increased opportunity in coaching men’s sports. In 2014, women only acted as head coach to 2-3.5% of men’s college teams (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014, p. 18). With more men exercising power over women’s sport in head coaching positions, female athletics is further subjected to hegemonic masculinity.

It is crucial for the development of reformed sport that women are given the opportunity to coach. Increasing the number of women coaches serves two purposes: (1)
it increases equality (a liberal feminist position) by expanding opportunities for women to coach and (2) it allows for reforms to take place (a radical feminist approach) by placing women in positions where they can implement reforms that help move sport away from the prevalent hegemonic masculinity. With more women coaches, it is possible that intercollegiate sport can become more gender-inclusive.

**Conclusion**

By mitigating hypercompetitive attitudes, emphasizing alternate values in sport, and supporting strong interpersonal relationships, this new model of sport moves toward the reform that Francis, French, Thelin, and Oriard advocate. This chapter proposes viable challenges to the hegemonic masculinity currently present in athletics. By following Francis’ call for reform, these conceptual changes to the way that we understand the current sport institution radically alter it, instead of only providing equality in a broken system. It offers a change that moves away from the ideals of hegemonic masculinity in athletics.

I have argued that the hypercompetitive attitudes associated with hegemonic masculinity are harmful to many women and men. To be sure, many can and have learned to do well in competition built on hegemonic masculinity. Many men and women, from youngsters just beginning competitive sport, to elite high school and college athletes, to professional sportspeople, have succeeded in sport, winning scholarships and prize money, developing excellent athletic skills, and scoring lucrative endorsement contracts. But, the masculine hegemony that has developed within and
alongside contemporary athletics generates a number of problems, particularly in marginalizing women and men who do not fit the hegemonic ideal. The successes of some do not justify the hegemonic system of sport for all. Challenging the masculine values of sport is important. Instead of merely searching for equality in a broken system, I have argued that we should strive to reform the institution of sport to make it better for both women and men.

This dissertation presents a version of reform that attempts to limit the influence of hegemonic masculinity on intercollegiate sport by proposing changes to way we think about competitions. It seeks to emphasize a variety of potential outcomes, multiple sites for meaning, and the development of interpersonal relationships. In allowing for the presence of this variety, this new model of sport can be considered pluralistic in nature. Because this model does not aim solely at one main goal—winning—it allows for a number of values to come to the fore. Softening the focus on victory and emphasizing meaning, optimal experience, aesthetic pleasure, and interpersonal relationships brings about a celebration of a number of behaviors, attitudes, and actions. This reconceptualized, pluralistic version of athletics combats the problems associated with intercollegiate sport highlighted by Francis, French, Thelin, and Oriard.
Epilogue

Directions for Future Study

Though I recognize the importance of cultural explanations throughout my analysis of reform, I want to propose that future study takes into account evolution and biology in human experience and behavior. The reforms suggested throughout this dissertation have focused on lessening the impact of hegemonic masculinity on sport, addressing human behavior from a primarily cultural standpoint. However, as Pinker (1997) argues, and as noted previously in this study, in a modern “scientific age, ‘to understand’ means to try to explain behavior as a complex interaction among (1) the genes, (2) the anatomy of the brain, (3) its biochemical state, (4) the person’s family upbringing, (5) the way society has treated him or her, and (6) the stimuli that impinge upon the person” (p. 53). So far, my analysis has only focused on Pinker’s points 4, 5, and 6, namely those related to nurture, culture, and the surrounding environment.

Looking primarily at cultural concerns related to moving sport away from hypercompetitive, hegemonic masculinity makes sense for many reasons. Arguably, many of the problems with contemporary sport, especially in terms of women’s role in athletics, can be attributed to cultural artifact. Social pressure to fit into stereotyped gender norms and cultural institutions that oppress women and men who do not meet the expectations of hegemonic masculinity surely lead to many of sports corruptions. Additionally, culture is a site where inequities can be found. Exposing these inequities as unfairly advantaging certain groups (e.g. men who fit into the norms of hegemonic masculinity), while placing others at a disadvantage (e.g. women and men who do not fit
into these norms) should be of prime importance. Recognizing the harms committed by cultural institutions may lead to change. New education and different behaviors can be encouraged by social groups. Cultural change can be sparked by a number of different methods, and with these changes can come greater equality (in this case, for women and men who do not fit into hegemonic masculinity).

Cultural considerations for justice in sport are also politically astute—historically, identifying differences between women and men has led to seeing women as inferior. Preventing the associations of difference with and inferiority should, arguably, must take priority. Furthermore, biological, evolutionary, and genetic studies of difference between women in men might be biased (e.g. by culture). They must be taken with a cautionary grain of salt. In addition to having potentially incorrect conclusions, studies of sex-linked differences may also have difficulty pinpointing disparities in women’s and men’s behaviors. Something as complex as competitive behavior likely has connections to both biological and cultural explanations—making it difficult to locate where and how these differences are affected by nature and nurture.

Despite the problems with negotiating biology and sex-linked differences, when looking at competition in sport, an analysis of biological, psychological, and evolutionary research might be warranted. This takes into account, then, Pinker’s first three points for explaining human behavior. Human behavior is complex and likely cannot be reduced to one root cause whether that be nature or any specific type of nurture. Thus, in this section, I will show that potential future studies may explain human behaviors, values,
and attitudes toward competition with a complex mixture of biological and cultural
influences.

It is important to note that evidence for sex-linked differences, especially those
related to sport and competition, is highly speculative. Much more research needs to be
done in order to find proven and logical links between competitive behaviors and
biological underpinnings. Studies may be biased toward reinforcing the traditional gender
order and may reify harmful stereotypes about femininity and masculinity. Proving the
biological antecedents of sex-linked differences might also be difficult. Additionally, the
cultural milieu must be such that differences are not only accepted, but celebrated. A
culture that sees difference as an opportunity to enforce sexist attitudes and reinforce
ideals of inferiority is not one that can embrace differences. Therefore, a study of sex-
linked differences in competition must be done with extreme caution, not only because
studies may be unable to confirm the biological causes and may include bias, but also
because cultural institutions that reinforce sexism still exist.

A full understanding of complex human behavior, I believe, requires a clear
depiction of culture and biology. To be sure, these analyses must work to remove bias
and celebrate differences for the distinctive strengths they embody. And they must see
differences as tendencies, not ironclad blueprints. Inspired by nature/nurture theories
espoused by Steven Pinker and Matt Ridley, this future study rejects explanations of
human behavior that attribute all traits to either biology or culture. These views are also
supported by Darwinian feminists, such as Patricia Gowaty, Griet Vandermassen, and
Sarah Blaffer Hrdy.
Feminist Support for Understanding the Nature/Nurture Debate

Some feminist scholars support the need for understanding the roles of both nature and nurture in human behavior. For example, Hrdy looks to evolutionary, ultimate causes, for patriarchal behavior. Instead of focusing only the proximate, cultural antecedents of male dominance, Hrdy (1997) believes that the roots of patriarchy can be seen in the very distant evolutionary past (p. 5). For her, inquiring about the evolutionary past and the need for males to control females is an “additional question” that is “far from preserving an oppressive status quo” and in fact, one that “provide[s] important insights for those who seek social change” (Hrdy, 1997, p. 28). In a similar vein, Gowaty insists on the compatibility of evolutionary theory and feminism. For Gowaty (1992), “evolutionary perspectives” can be “inclusive and empowering, suggestive of ways we can further foster our efforts for women’s autonomy” (p. 226).

In fact, these Darwinian feminists find it harmful to ignore the effects of evolution on behavior. Vandermussen (2004) sees more harm than good in feminists ignoring biological and evolutionary theory. For her, the “lack of openness toward other than social-constructionist accounts of gender difference” gives feminists an uninformed perspective that limits their ability to understand human behavior (Vandermassen, 2004, pp. 20–21). She argues that feminists must take into account “all possible sources of information…not just those that exert an ideological appeal to feminists” (Vandermassen, 2004, pp. 20–21, emphasis original).

Though these Darwinian feminists argue for the importance of studying nature and nurture, they do acknowledge the potential biases present in scientific inquiry. Hrdy
and Vandermassen explicitly lament the influence of Victorian ideals on Darwin’s theory of sexual selection (Hrdy, 1999, pp. 18, 496–497; Vandermassen, 2004, pp. 10–11). However, despite these biases, they argue that science should not be thrown out altogether. Hrdy (1999) states that “The existence of past biases in science, then, is no grounds for abandoning the enterprise altogether; but it certainly is grounds for introducing better safeguards against the all-too-human propensity for self-serving self-deceptions” (p. 497). Even in acknowledging the potential biases and problems associated with studying evolution, Hrdy, Gowaty, and Vandermassen find biology to be a necessary aspect of understanding human behavior, including oppressive norms that place women in inferior cultural positions.

The Plausibility of Explaining Human Behavior through Biology and Culture

Thinkers like Pinker and Ridley make a case for the plausibility of theories of nature and nurture explaining human behaviors. For Pinker (2002), a fuller understanding of human nature comes from both culture and biology, especially in the fields of cognitive science, neuroscience, behavioral genetics, and evolutionary psychology (pp. 32–54). He outlines research that articulates the idea that genes provide a range of possibilities in human behavior, but that the environment is what shapes and allows these effects (Pinker, 2002, pp. 48–49). Pinker (2002) contends that human behaviors transpire because nature and nurture interact, saying, “our potential comes from the combinatorial interplay of wonderfully complex faculties, not from the passive blankness of an empty tablet” (p. 421). He concludes that a theory relying only on learning and culture, is “anti-
life, anti-human,” because it “denies our common humanity, our inherent interests, and our individual preferences” (Pinker, 2002, p. 421). Pinker’s argument hinges on the idea that neither biology nor culture are avoidable—and that we cannot explain human behavior without both.

Ridley (2003) makes a similar argument as Pinker, claiming that “human behavior has to be explained by both nature and nurture” and that in reality, it can be understood as “nature via nurture” (pp. 3–4). He contends that genes are made to interact with the surrounding environment (Ridley, 2003, pp. 3–4). For Ridley, the greatest error is to see nature and nurture as a dichotomy. He argues that “There is nothing factually wrong with arguing that human beings are capable of learning… But it does not follow that therefore human beings have no instincts… Both can be true” (Ridley, 2003, p. 189). Therefore, Ridley’s theory takes into account both the human potential to learn and create culture and the genetic endowments and changes to brain structure that allow for learning and culture to occur. Without nature, culture never emerges. Without nurture, genes can never be expressed.

It is important to note that utilizing biological and evolutionary theories does not require biological determinism. The theories posited by Pinker, Ridley, Gowaty, Vandermassen, and Hrdy only suggest that genes, physiology, and evolution profoundly influence human behavior, not that they totally determine it. Additionally, these scholars argue against cultural imposition. While culture and surrounding environment do influence behavior greatly, as noted by these researchers, it does not merely impose or ascribe behaviors and attitudes on people. An approach that takes into account nature and
nurture opposes both biological determinism and cultural imposition. Instead, it theorizes that human traits and attitudes are shaped by interactions between biology and culture.

**Concerns about Biological Explanations and Sex-Linked Differences in Competition**

While Darwinian feminists, such as Hrdy, Gowaty, and Vandermassen provide support for theories on nature/nurture, and others, like Pinker and Ridley lend plausibility to the argument both biology and culture can explain human behaviors, this type of thinking raises concerns, especially in relation to sex-linked differences. In this section I will briefly address these concerns with potential arguments. While these arguments are not fully fleshed out, they do point in possible directions for refuting and answering the claims of critics of biological perspectives.

First, there are questions surrounding the plausibility of sex-linked differences. Some scholars may question the existence of these differences, their durability, and the potential for bias in such studies. However, these concerns may be addressed in a few ways.

- Sex-linked biological differences are generally accepted by most in a variety of physiological domains. On average, women and men show differences in height, weight, body composition, hormonal composition, and reproductive systems. From a holistic point of view, based in part on the scholarship of Pinker and Ridley, it is illogical then to think that intellectual and psychological aspects of human behavior would not be affected by evolution and biology. If human characteristics and behaviors result from a
combination of nature and nurture, then biological influences extend beyond physiology to psychology, the intellect, and the like.

- Carol Gilligan’s (1982) work on moral reasoning provides an example of scholarship focusing on potential sex-linked differences not associated with physiology. She argued that women reason differently than men in moral situations. Her research on girls and women lays the groundwork for studying sex-linked differences in behavior. On her model, differences between men and women can be found, celebrated, and treated with equal respect.

A second problem with sex-linked differences arises from the notion that historically, differences often lead to viewing one group (e.g. women) as inferior. United States Supreme Court decisions uphold this belief by affirming that separation does lead to unequal treatment. However, while it has been the case that recognizing differences often leads to inferiority, this does not necessarily need to be the case. Potential arguments to address this concern might be made in a few of the following ways.

- Logically, differences do not require inferiority. Normative disparity, in other words, need not be a product of difference. From a philosophic perspective, metaphysical, axiological, and ethical questions are better answered through fuller descriptions of the world …including differences. Ignoring parts of these descriptions for political reasons (while well-meaning) may move us farther from fuller understandings of human behaviors.
• Pluralism in values, excellences, behaviors, and attitudes is also supported by philosophy. MacIntyre (1984) argues that the good life can have a wide variety of goods and excellences. The specific combinations of excellences needed for the good life are unique to the individual. So, MacIntyre gives equal weight to a variety of excellences in the good life.

• While historically women’s sport has been harmed by arguments of difference, the political terrain today may be safer. With Title IX and the success of other liberal feminist projects, more women than ever before have gained access to sport. They have shown that they have the capability to compete at the highest levels. Though improvements for women still need to be made for complete justice, backsliding toward decreased opportunities seems unlikely, just as it is unlikely that women’s suffrage, right to education, and other important gains will be lost or eroded.

• Current political and cultural terrains are also more accepting. Various identities (such as LGBT) are celebrated, despite (and possibly even because of) differences. However, greater acceptance of individuals with various identities demonstrates that differences can and should be accepted and celebrated. LGBT identities do suggest that a broader understanding of gender and sexuality are necessary. But, they do also suggest that differences can and should be celebrated.

While there are legitimate questions and concerns related analyzing sex-linked differences, there are potential advantages as well. In terms of competition, a preliminary
analysis reveals at least three areas that may provide potential insight into sex-linked differences in competitive behavior.

- Evolutionary research indicates that competition plays a role in sexual selection and that men and women interact differently in terms of competitive behavior. This research suggests, from an evolutionary perspective, that reproductive choice, parental investment, and interpersonal relationships may lead to and be affected by sex-linked differences in competition (see Darwin, 1974; Hunt, Breuker, Sadowski, & Moore, 2009; Ong, 1981; Trivers, 1972; Vandermassen, 2004; Van Vugt, 2011; Van Vugt, De Cremer, & Janssen, 2007).


- Some feminist scholars note that women’s perceptions of competition may differ from typical masculinist viewpoints. They find feminist competitive scenarios as a way to build community bonds, challenge masculine
hegemonic norms, and build a sense of the self (see Antunovic & Hardin, 2013; Davion, 1987; Lenskyi, 1994; Lenskyj, 1995; van Daalen, 2005).

This evidence is not comprehensive, nor does it tell the full story about sex-linked differences in competition. These studies must be evaluated for bias, poor methodology, and thus too incorrect conclusions. However, this research should not be summarily discounted. Rather they stand as initial (albeit incomplete and inconclusive) studies of competition that take into account a variety of descriptions of human behavior, including biological, evolutionary, economic, psychological, and cultural studies. In addition to being advantageous as a cross-disciplinary approach, taking into account both biological and cultural influences can potentially help move toward even stronger reforms. While the reforms noted in this dissertation help to move away from hegemonic masculinity and the tacit acceptance of masculinity as the prime value in sport, ignoring differences still implies that unique women’s (and men’s) perspectives have been forfeited in exchange for the status quo. Taking into account a variety of unique experiences, even if they are related to sex-linked differences, may help to move forward from the current state of affairs in sport.

While there are potential advantages to including sex-linked differences in analyses of sport and competition, this remains highly speculative. The evidence currently available must be closely investigated before the differences it suggests can have any impact on reform or any other aspects of sport. However, as noted by Pinker and Ridley, and supported by Darwinian feminists like Gowaty, Vandermassen, and Hrdy, the inclusion of both nature and nurture, evolutionary research and cultural studies,
can help provide a more detailed picture of human behavior. Thus, I plan to take these kinds of studies into account in my future studies when attempting to answer questions about sport and competition.
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VITA

Colleen English

EDUCATION

Ph.D. Kinesiology
The Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA
Concentration: Philosophy and History of Sport
Graduate Minor: Women’s Studies

B.S., Kinesiology, May 2009
The Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA

UNIVERSITY WORK EXPERIENCE

2014-2015 Visiting Assistant Professor
Marshall University

2009-2014 Graduate Teaching Assistant/Instructor
The Pennsylvania State University

SELECTED PRESENTATIONS


“This One’s for the Women: Developing Alternative Forms of Competition,” International Association for the Philosophy of Sport, 41st Annual Meeting, Fullerton, California, USA, September 4-8, 2013

AWARDS

R. Scott Kretchmar Graduate Student Essay Award, International Association for the Philosophy of Sport, 2012