SOFTBALL’S OLYMPIC DEFEAT: A CONTENT ANALYSIS OF THE ONLINE PRESENCE OF WOMEN ON INTERNATIONAL SPORTS FEDERATION WEBSITES

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by
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ABSTRACT

After softball was dropped from the 2012 Olympic program, the International Softball Federation formed an initiative to regain inclusion. The initiative was unsuccessful. The purpose of this thesis was to examine the International Softball Federation’s communicative efforts by comparing its website with current Olympic team sport federation websites. This study utilized a qualitative content analysis to observe any differences in representation of gender and nationalism. Findings demonstrated that the federation websites offered a Western perspective of international sports and perpetuated common frames regarding female athletes such as exclusion, reinforced femininity, and hyper-sexualization. This thesis offers a unique contribution to the field of sports communication research, as it is the first to study federation websites, which are created by the sports associations themselves, rather than news coverage or advertisements, over which athletes and sports organizations have less control.
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Chapter 1

After four consecutive Olympic appearances, the sport of women’s softball was removed from the Olympic program after the 2008 Summer Olympics. While its fate was sealed for the 2012 games, the International Softball Federation (ISF) hoped to see the sport reinstated by the 2016 Summer Olympics. However, on August 13, 2009, the International Olympic Committee’s executive board voted down bids by softball (and baseball) for readmission. Golf and rugby won the majority of votes and the opportunity for inclusion in the 2016 games while the Olympic fate of softball remains uncertain.

Since the initial announcement in 2006 that softball was not going to be included in the 2012 games the ISF has proactively worked to improve the appeal of softball’s Olympic bid. The ‘Back Softball’ campaign was created specifically for this endeavor and promotes the sport through an online and ‘on the ground’ presence (International Softball Federation, n.d.). A substantial portion of the ISF’s initiative was conducted through groundwork such as starting up leagues and introducing the sport to new countries around the world; however, the primary focus of this study is on the online communicative processes undertaken by the ISF through the use of their websites.

The purpose of this thesis is to examine the web presence of women within international sports federations. More specifically, a comparative analysis was conducted between the ISF and federations for the current women’s Olympic team sports such as basketball, soccer, ice hockey, and volleyball. Using the sports federations’ official websites and linked media content, I hope to understand how these federations handle women’s sports and communicate to and build relationships with a global audience through the Internet, and to observe any differences in their communicative processes. How the federations position and promote women and sports will be
more specifically examined through the federations’ use of online features, frames, and impression management strategies.

Although softball is not the first or only sport to be removed from the Olympics, the case of softball and its “Back Softball” campaign is significant. It is an international women’s sport that is continually problematized by the dominance of the United States women’s softball team. With the exception of the 2008 Olympic games, the U.S. team won all three prior Olympic gold medals and seven World Championship titles (USA Softball, n.d.). However, softball is played in 128 countries, and perhaps just needs more time for the playing field to even out. Softball is not the only sport to be dominated by one country in its early years of Olympic inclusion. For example, Canada dominated men’s ice hockey from 1920-1952, winning six of the seven gold medals, and the United States won the first seven gold medals in men’s basketball from 1936-1968. Additionally, since the inclusion of cross-country skiing in 1924, Norway, Finland, and Sweden have won the vast majority of medals across all disciplines (International Olympic Committee, 2009; Killion, 2010).

The elimination of softball is also significant because it was one of three women-only sports in the summer games (Goldman, 2008). This is relevant because gender equality in sports has not yet been reached, within the Olympics or even within the United States where Title IX has, in its thirty plus years of existence, greatly increased female participation rates at the high school and collegiate level (Brown & Connolly, 2010). Title IX states, “No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance…” (Title IX of the Education Amendments, 1972). Other countries do not have similarly non-discriminatory laws regarding athletic participation and therefore, the
decision to eliminate a sport that seeks to provide athletic opportunities for girls and women may prove detrimental to not only the sport’s overall growth but also to the growth of female athletics (Brown & Connolly, 2010).

These international issues of identity and gender are what make women’s team sports and their online presence a relevant and important topic for further investigation, especially in light of the more recent occurrences between women’s sports and the International Olympic Committee. For instance, women ski jumpers’ bid for inclusion in the 2006 and the 2010 Winter Olympics was repeatedly turned down by the IOC on the basis that the sport had not developed as much as necessary and therefore would lack enough elite female competitors (Thomas, 2010; Thomas, 2010a). At the conclusion of the 2010 Winter Olympics, women’s ice hockey came under scrutiny as a result of the dominance of the American and Canadian teams. The IOC President, Jacques Rogge was quoted saying, "This is maybe the investment period in women's ice hockey. I would personally give them more time to grow but there must be a period of improvement. We cannot continue without improvement" (Lee, 2010, para. 3).

Additionally, research into this topic is important because the manner in which these sporting federations frame and present women’s sports may influence the media’s treatment of the sport and its female athletes. This research contributes to the ongoing and growing body of work about the globalization process of sports, women in sports, and the Internet as a potential tool for building international relationships through online communication. This study sets itself apart as it is different from the majority of other topically similar studies. My focus is on an unmediated text. Rather than investigating how the media portrayed these sports and women, this thesis examined the sports federations’ means of interacting with their audiences and how they portrayed women in sports.
I will first provide necessary background information, including a brief history of the sport of softball and its Olympic existence. Then, in the literature review I delve into the issues surrounding women, sports, and the media. The globalization process of sports and the international politics surrounding the Olympics are also discussed. In addition, the role of public relations and the Internet is reviewed by examining dialogical communication, framing, and impression management strategies. In the methodology and sample section I take a closer look at qualitative content analysis and explain the coding scheme. In the findings and discussion sections I will examine the themes, provide examples, and discuss the implications of the findings in order to ultimately offer suggestions to the International Softball Federation to improve the “Back Softball” initiative.

Background

A brief history of Olympic softball

The sport of women’s softball originated in and has long been dominated by the United States. A by-product of baseball, the beginnings of softball can be traced back to Chicago, Illinois, in 1887. Competitive fastpitch softball, as we know it today, made its international debut at the first women’s World Championship held in Melbourne, Australia in 1965 (Littlewood, 1998). However, it was not until June 13, 1991 that the International Olympic Committee (IOC) announced that softball would be added to the 1996 Summer Olympic Program. Heading into the 1996 Olympics, the United States women’s softball team boasted a remarkable record of 110 wins and only 1 loss in the last decade of international play (Littlewood, 1998).

In the sport’s inaugural appearance, Australia, Canada, China, Chinese Taipei, Japan, the Netherlands, Puerto Rico, and the United States competed for the first Olympic gold. As expected, the United States dominated the competition and took home gold, defeating China 3-1
in the championship game. Australia, the only team to beat the United States in round robin play, took home the bronze medal. Four years later, the 2000 Summer Olympics was held in Sydney, Australia. Joining the competition were Cuba, Italy, and New Zealand. Once again the United States easily won the gold medal. Japan improved from its 1996 4th place finish to earn the silver medal. In front of the home crowd, Australia captured the bronze. The United States continued its winning streak into the 2004 Summer Olympics capturing their third consecutive Gold medal and outscoring their opponents 51-1. Switching places on the podium from the previous games, Australia went home with the silver medal and Japan finished third winning the Bronze (International Softball Federation, 2010a).

Fourteen years and three Olympic games after receiving the exciting news that softball would be included in the Olympics, the IOC voted in July 2005 to remove softball and baseball from the 2012 program (Zinser, 2005). The 2008 Summer Olympics would then serve as softball’s last Olympic hoorah. With the future of softball uncertain, Australia, Canada, China, Chinese Taipei, Japan, the Netherlands, the United States, and Venezuela competed in Beijing for one last chance at gold. The still heavily favored American team easily made it to the championship game; however, for the first time in softball’s Olympic history, the US women’s softball team would not be the ones wearing gold. Led by an impressive pitching staff, Japan’s softball team beat the United States 3-1 in the championship game. The United States went home with silver and Australia stayed on the podium winning bronze (International Softball, 2010a). At the conclusion of the medal ceremony the players from Japan, the United States, and Australia grabbed buckets of softballs and spelled out “2016” on the field displaying their unity and hope that softball would be re-instated for the 2016 Summer Olympics (USA Softball, n.d.).
The IOC and its role in the promotion of women

Concerning the Olympics, The International Olympic Committee is, “…The supreme authority of the Olympic Movement” (IOC, 2009). The committee is comprised of 115 members: 70 individuals, 15 active athletes, 15 International Federation representatives, and 15 National Olympic Committee representatives. Major decisions regarding host cities and the selection of sports, for example, are made by the IOC’s Executive Board, which consists of 15 members and is headed up by the IOC president. Jacques Rogge is the current president of the IOC. Rogge, a Belgian, was elected in 2001 and is only the 8th president in the history of the IOC, which was established in June of 1894. Women were not permitted to be members of the committee until 1981 (Chappelet & Kuber-Mabbott, 2008). In an effort to increase female participation within the IOC administration, the committee set the goal of reaching 20% inclusion by 2005 (Pound, 2004). As of 2010, 19 members were women, which is only 16.5% of the committee. According to Pound (2004), this still places the IOC ahead of many International Federations (IFs) and National Olympic Committees (NOCs) in terms of female involvement.

As the authoritative body of the Olympics, the IOC holds a very powerful position in the world of sports and can potentially influence the growth of women’s athletics. Although the IOC is self-charged with a number of tasks, its goals most relevant to this study include: “To encourage and support the promotion of women in sport at all levels and in all structures with a view to implementing the principle of equality of men and women” and “To encourage and support the efforts of sports organizations and public authorities to provide for the social and professional future of athletes” (IOC, 2009). Corresponding with these goals, Rogge made the prediction that by 2014, “there will be 50% women participating at the Olympics” (Pound, 2004,
However, at the 2008 Summer Olympics only 42% of all athletes were women, and the ratio for the 2010 Winter Olympics was not any closer to reaching the goal of equal participation. Only 40.6% of the athletes were female (Brennan, 2010). Mark Adams, an IOC spokesman, defends the numbers and explained, "Year on year for Winter and Summer Olympics, we are increasing female representation" (as quoted in Brennan, 2010, para. 9).

Christine Brennan (2010), an American sports columnist, is less comforted by the statistics. She explains, “…You look at his [Rogge] track record on women’s sports, a history of uncertainty, exclusion, and very slow change, if not downright stagnation, and you have to wonder what to believe” (para. 2). Brennan (2010) not only cites the loss of softball and the exclusion of women’s ski jumping as examples but also points out that the two new sports to be added in 2016, golf and rugby each have powerful groups (Augusta National Golf Club and The Royal and Ancient Golf Club of St Andrews) within its sport that do not allow women membership. Brennan (2010) argues it is up to the IOC to set an example and work against male chauvinism in sports.

**The ISF’s Back Softball campaign**

The 2005 “Olympic Programme Commission: Report to the 117th IOC Session” report was the basis for the IOC’s decision to remove baseball and softball from future games, beginning in 2012 (International Olympic Committee, 2005). Judging criteria from the report included information about each sport’s Olympic history, universality, popularity among TV viewers, facility requirements, respect for ethics, and track record with anti-doping (Chappelet & Kuber-Mabbott, 2008). The reports came at the request of current IOC president Jacques Rogge who, concerned with the possibility of the Olympic games becoming too large, called for regular
evaluations of all current sports (Chappelet & Kuber-Mabbott, 2008). The IOC committee voted on each sport. Softball and baseball were the only two to not receive a majority vote and the first sports to be dropped from the Olympic program since polo in 1936 (Michaelis, 2005).

Understanding the detrimental effects of this decision, the ISF began to formulate a plan even before the official announcement was made to get softball back into the Olympics by 2016. According to the International Softball Federation’s official website, “The ISF is the governing body of softball internationally as recognized by the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and the General Association of International Sports Federations (GAISF)” (2010). The ISF coordinates and regulates international competitions for youth, women, men, and co-ed leagues and is comprised of 128 National Federations. It is the role of the sporting federation to “promote and develop a specific sport or a group of sports disciplines on a world level. Its objective is to represent all those practicing the said sport …” (Chappelet & Kuber-Mabbott, 2008, p. 59). To work toward its goal of re-inclusion, the ISF formed a committee and the “Back Softball” initiative was created.

The “Back Softball” campaign was officially launched in June of 2007. The plan intended to be dynamic and flexible. The initiative outlined ten goals to help continue the growth of the sport through opportunity, exposure, inclusion, and access. Broadly, the first three goals aim to increase the number of nations playing softball, the number of worldwide participants playing softball, and the number of youth accessing sport through softball. The fourth goal is to place an even greater emphasis on opportunities for women in sport. The fifth goal aims to provide greater worldwide access to people with disabilities. Other notable goals include providing equipment and coaches where needed and to increase the media coverage of softball games. Lastly and more specifically related to the Olympics is its pledge to conduct the “Back
Softball” campaign in the true spirit of the Olympics, meaning that movement will be performed in the spirit of “fair play”. In addition to creating an independent website and Facebook page for the “Back Softball” campaign, a number of press releases were also written to garner support and attention for the ISF initiative (International Softball Federation, n.d.).

Although softball’s companion sport, baseball, was also organizing an effort to gain re-admittance into the Olympics, the ISF made a decision to not join forces with the International Baseball Federation (IBAF). Asked why, ISF President Don Porter said, “We have offered the I.O.C. a doping-free, universal team sport that reflects the values of Olympism all over the world” (Longman, 2009, para. 5). Aligning with baseball could have been a catch twenty-two situation for other reasons as well. Unlike softball, baseball does not necessarily need the Olympics to showcase its sport on a global level. IBAF has the World Series and World Baseball Classic. Also relevant to the success of baseball’s bid was whether IBAF could guarantee big name players from the MLB would participate in the Olympic games. For these reasons, the ISF decided that its best chance for winning votes was to separate itself from baseball (Longman, 2009). Despite years of preparation, planning, and campaigning, the International Olympic Committee’s Executive Board did not recommend softball for re-inclusion in the games at the August 2009 vote.

The ISF intended to use the “Back Softball” campaign to demonstrate that its values and the Olympic values aligned. According to the official Olympic website, “The goal of the Olympic Movement is to contribute to building a peaceful and better world by educating youth through sport practiced without discrimination of any kind and in the Olympic spirit, which requires mutual understanding with a spirit of friendship, solidarity and fair play” (International Olympic Committee, 2009). Comments left by players and fans on the Facebook page and
spokespeople from the ISF all agree that softball is a sport that embodies the values of the Olympics.

As a female fan of the game I have a personal interest in seeing this sport continue to grow, but this issue pertains to more than just female softball players and fans. This sport is not just for girls. People of all ages can participate in its many variations. Ultimately, the game does provide additional opportunities for women and girls to engage in sports. Softball presents another avenue of athletic female empowerment by promoting an active lifestyle and a healthy body image. Additionally the game has a clean, drug-free, reputation and is gaining an international presence across all continents. The Olympics provided softball and female athletes with global exposure, but the IOC’s vote to eliminate the game is not only detrimental to the Olympic Movement’s pledge to promote gender equality but also to future generations’ of female players seeking acceptance in the sporting world.

To summarize, the purpose of this thesis is to examine how the International Softball Federation and other team sports federations, portray male and female athletes, appeals to an international audience, and how they utilize online tools and public relations strategies to advance their agendas and communicate with various audiences. Most studies have examined gender and sports in television, magazines, radio, and newspapers but there is a lack of research pertaining to gender and sports in the digital space. This thesis will work towards filling that gap. The primary goals are to understand and observe any differences between the federations’ web presences and to ultimately provide suggestions to the ISF to enhance their “Back Softball” efforts by investigating the following research question: What differences exist between the International Softball Federation’s website and other sports federations’ websites with regard to portrayals of gender and communicative efforts?
Chapter 2

Literature Review

In order to understand the federations’ communicative and relationship building processes through the use of the Internet, it is beneficial to first situate these sports in the global context in which they operate. An essential aspect to consider is the predicament of gender in sports. Each of the five female sports being examined here is derived from a popular male counterpart and has been traditionally labeled as masculine (Baroffio-Bota & Banet-Weiser, 2006). Furthermore, because these federations function on a global scale, issues of identity and globalization will influence their reception and international status. In this case, the Olympics are one of the most prominent spaces in which both international issues and gender issues unfold in front of a global audience. Understanding the organization and evolution of the Olympics can shed light on the current status of women’s team sports on an international level. While many external forces can contribute to the perception of a sport, organizations—such as these athletic federations—also play an active role in defining their identity and relationships. Most relevant to this study is their use of the Internet in creating and maintaining international identities and relationships, which will be examined through a public relations framework of framing and impression management. Much of the current research to date has focused on the mediation of sports, which has provided an external definition of sports; however, the focus on the actual sporting federations themselves, using their official websites, sets this thesis apart.

The gendered nature of sports

In the United States, men, women, and children play the sport of softball; however, at the highest competitive international level—The Olympics—softball is a women’s sport
On the other hand, men and women both compete in soccer, volleyball, ice hockey, and basketball in the Olympics. However, regardless of the progress made towards gender equality, Title IX being one such example, the area of sports still remains problematic and largely contested. “Women are frequently segregated involuntarily into different types of sports, events, and competitions specifically targeted to women” (United Nations, 2007, p. 3). Miller, Lawrence, McKay, & Rowe (2001) explain, “Ambivalence about the ‘National Sportswomen’ among many male players and spectators is symptomatic of the gendered value structure of the sports body” (p. 87). According to Duncan (2006), women athletes are paradoxical because the attributes most associated with sports such as strength, power, and aggression are commonly attached to the idea of masculinity. Duncan further clarifies that because we tend to think in binary terms, women are then described as the opposite of or what men are not, which complicates the notion of women as athletes.

Adding to the complex nature of gender and sports, David Houck (2006) adds that, “Sporting bodies are bound up in complex networks of knowledge, power, and discourse…” (p. 546). He explains that female competitors are okay as long as they stay feminine. For instance, sports such as figure skating are safely feminine because success is achieved through characteristics such as grace, flare, and poise, all attributes mainly associated with women (Houck, 2006). Their appearance and corresponding uniforms—sparkly, form fitting, and revealing—also reinforce the fact that they are women. Giardina and Metz (2005) further explain that even as we, the American culture, have become more accustomed to seeing women participating in traditionally masculine sports it has become necessary to reinforce their femininity off the playing field. Giardina and Metz (2005) go on to say, “The resulting compromise enacted by both consumers and marketers, then, remains one that dictates the
aggressive female athlete must invoke some level of hetero-social normativity and display feminine characteristics when she is not engaged in sporting activity” (p. 111). Additionally, team sports such as softball or basketball, are compared to their male counterparts of the MLB and the NBA, making it more difficult to distinguish their possible feminine qualities (Kane & Lenskyi, 1998). This factor also delegitimizes women’s sports because comparatively the women’s versions cannot measure up to the ‘real thing.’ The notion that the ‘original’ is always better is a popular sentiment plaguing women’s leagues (Houck, 2006, p. 549). By relegating female athletes to ‘girl’ versions of sports, their contributions to athletics appear insignificant compared to male athletes who compete in the ‘real thing’ (Shugart, 2003). Koivula (1999) argues that this is detrimental to women’s sports because:

…In team sports, the athletes directly compete against one another in attempts to outmatch or overpower their opponents. These athletes are motivated by a need for power. By excluding women from team sports and in the reporting of team sports in the media…women are denied the opportunity to exert power in the sporting world (p. 602).

Deford (2004) explains that women’s teams struggle in comparison to men’s teams because choosing to root for a specific team is intertwined with one’s identity and as such, men have issues with women representing them. Wann (2006) defines team identification as, “…The extent to which a fan feels a psychological connection to a team and the team’s performances are viewed as self-relevant” (p. 332). There is one notable exception however. National identity can trump gender identity when it comes to global sporting events like the Olympics (Wensing & Bruce, 2003). Although a number of factors contribute to team identification Sutton, McDonald, Milne, and Cimperman (1997) found that “community affiliation is the most significant correlate” (p. 18). Jinxia (2003) explains that because “national interest takes precedence over any lingering male chauvinism” women’s sports occasionally receive more equitable support in
the form of fans and program interest (p. 200). For example, the U.S. Women’s soccer team’s sudden rise in popularity after winning the 1999 Women’s World Cup was to some degree aided by our ability to identify with the team representing our nation. We like to root for ourselves.

**Women, sports, and the media**

The media bears responsibility for disseminating our culture’s lack of comfort with athletic women (Duncan, 2006). Media, as an institution, is extremely powerful in perpetuating these perceptions because the majority of people are exposed to and experience the highest level of professional and amateur sports through the media. As Duncan (2006) explains, “The media, like sport and all our social institutions, are bearers of masculine hegemony, an ideology or set of beliefs about the world that privileges men and disadvantages women” (p. 231). The various forms of media, such as print and television, have employed various techniques in covering women’s sports. Initially coverage was minimal, if non-existent, but as exposure has increased the media has continually resorted to specific frames to make sense of the women and sports contradiction.

**Types of coverage**

Commodification of sexuality is the most notable example of how the media handles women athletes (Baroffio-Bota & Banet-Weiser, 2006). Television and print media in the United States are largely operated by a commercial revenue model and are owned by media conglomerates that work to commodify sports in order to reach specific audiences and sell advertising to those audiences and to fill their programming schedules or print space in a cost effective manner (Bellamy, 2006; Sullivan, 2006). Sex sells, so the media has begun to regularly employ the strategy of commodifying the female athlete’s body, “The value of the female athlete...
is often determined in terms of her body type, attractiveness, and sex appeal, rather than in terms of the qualities that define her as an athlete” (United Nations, 2007). Athletes such as Misty May-Treanor and Anna Kournikova are just two examples of the way the media has focused as much if not more attention on their physical appearance than their actual sporting performance. For example, a study of British tabloid coverage of the 2000 Wimbledon tournament demonstrated that 67% of the articles about Kournikova focused on her attractiveness and desirability rather than her tennis performance. Also, even though she never won a match, half of all stories pertaining to Wimbledon featured Kournikova (Harris & Clayton, 2002). Duncan (2006) explains that besides catering to a largely male audience, the hyper-feminine portrayals reinforce the female athlete sexuality as being heteronormative (p. 240). Both the media and athletes themselves tend to put a greater emphasis on fashion, marital status, and their overall femininity to prove or imply that they are heterosexual. Baroffio-Bota and Banet-Weiser (2006) explain that, “Not surprisingly, it is in those sports that most resemble masculinized athletics (for example, soccer, softball, or hockey), and those that have the greatest need to attract a paying audience, that the fear of and anxiety over lesbianism are most prominent” (p. 492).

Besides sexualization, women are often referred to as girls or children rather than actual women (Daddario, 1994). Considering the majority of sports commentators are male, this can be interpreted as patronizing. Additionally, commentaries on female athletes differ from that of men in their sustained focus on a woman’s body and her physical beauty (Duncan, Messner, & Willms, 2000; Eastman & Billings, 2000; Harris & Clayton, 2002; Mayeda, 2001). Other studies on the commentary of women in sports have found that the perception of females’ emotions as being potentially detrimental to their overall performance are perpetuated (Harris & Clayton, 2002; Kane & Disch, 1993; Mayeda 2001).
According to Duncan (2006), “The obsession with an athlete’s beauty diverts attention from the potential threat that a sportswoman poses to hegemonic masculinity and reaffirms sexual difference by playing up her feminine appearance” (p. 243). The various media industries, which are internally male dominated, actively disseminates these frames, which exert power over women by perpetuating the fear that there must be something wrong with them if they do not appear feminine. Equitable coverage of women’s sports should also be measured in terms of quality. Whether a woman appears feminine on or off the court should not matter. She should be judged on her athletic performance rather than physical appearance. Women’s sports and female athletes continue to fight for exposure and the legitimization of their sports. The role they play in shaping these messages will be discussed later.

**Amount of coverage**

In the world of sports there is a disproportionate amount of coverage afforded to men versus women across all media platforms (Duncan, 2006). Referring to the general amount of coverage received in the United States, a 1999 Amateur Athletic Foundation study of ESPN’s *SportsCenter* found that only 2.2% of airtime was dedicated to women’s sports whereas 96.7% was dedicated to men (Duncan, 2006). Other studies focusing on ESPN and other cable sports programs such as CNN’s *Sport’s Tonight* found that less than 10% of airtime was devoted to women on any given night, which includes days of major tournaments or championship games (Eastman & Billings, 2000). According to IOC member Anita DeFrantz, as of 2004 the ratio for television coverage was 95 to 1 and 20 to 1 in print media (as quoted in United Nations, 2007, p. 25).

Other studies that examined magazines and newspapers from the United States (Bishop, 2003; Eastman & Billings, 2000; Hardin, et. al, 2002) also found disparities between the quantity
of photos and articles afforded to male and female athletes. Bishop (2003) examined the content
and photos from *Sports Illustrated* and found “…no significant increase since 1979 in feature
coverage of women’s sports” (p. 192). He also found a decrease in the overall percentage of
photos afforded to women. An examination of *Sports Illustrated for Kids* found significantly
more photos of male athletes than female athletes (Hardin, et. al, 2002). A 2000 study by
Eastman and Billings of photos and articles found in *The New York Times* sports section found
that 86% of all photos were of men and 11% of women. In terms of content, of the 951 articles
only 11% were about women.

**Women athletes and the Olympics**

A number of studies revolving around the more recent (1996 through 2006) Summer and
Winter Olympic Games (Andrews, 1998; Billings, 2008; Eastman & Billings, 1999; Jones,
Murrell & Jackson, 1999; Tuggle & Owen, 1999) analyzed the quantity of coverage afforded to
women in print and television. In each of the games, women’s sports received less media
attention than men’s events. Also interesting to note is that women’s team sports such as softball
and basketball received even less coverage than individual sports like swimming or gymnastics.
The 2008 Billings study counted the total clock-time afforded to male and female sports by NBC
from all Summer and Winter Olympics between 1996 and 2006. The results still favor men but
were not as drastically disparaging as other studies. The 1996 Summer Olympics were the most
balanced and even promoted as the “Games of the Women” by NBC. American women teams
were quite successful that year, winning gold in the gymnastics team all-around, basketball,
soccer, and softball. Another finding of interest is the difference in time between the Winter
Olympics and Summer Olympics. Women athletes competing in the Summer Games had much
more media time than that of their Winter Olympic counterparts. Billings suggests that the
difference may be due to the greater number of ‘attractive sports’ in the summer such as beach volleyball, swimming, and gymnastics (p. 439).

**Sponsorship and corporatization**

Corporate sponsorship of athletes, teams, and events has become the norm within the institution of sports (Kinney, 2006). Similar to the imbalance of media coverage, women’s athletics are far less corporatized and receive less sponsorship than their male counterparts (Shaw & Amis, 2001). Although sponsorship on local and regional levels has existed for decades, the 1984 Summer Olympics hosted by Los Angeles, California is often cited as the catalyst for the corporatization of sports on an international level (International Olympic Committee, 2009; Lough & Irwin, 2001; Silk, Andrews, & Cole, 2005). Due to the financial disaster at the 1976 games, Los Angeles was the only city to bid for the 1984 Summer Olympics. According to the IOC, “The bid was criticized for depending heavily on existing facilities and corporate sponsors. However, the Games produced a healthy profit of USD 223 million and became the model for future Games” (“Los Angles 1984”, 2009, para. 1).

Since the Los Angeles games, the practice of corporate sponsorship has become increasingly intertwined in the sports business. However, Lough and Irwin (2001) identify the 1996 Summer Olympics as the true beginning for women’s sports sponsorship. Although the success of women at the Atlanta games may have caused corporations to pay attention to them too, the sponsorship of women’s sports and athletes has been a much slower process than it was for the men (Shaw & Amis, 2001). For example the Men’s 1998 FIFA World Cup received approximately $360 million dollars in sponsorship (Millar, 1998) whereas the Women’s 1999 FIFA World Cup only received a total of $6 million dollars in sponsorship (Mullen, 1999). Years
later, this disparity continues to be an issue for women’s soccer and women’s sports in general. At the 2007 FIFA Women's Football Symposium delegates identified a number of elements necessary to the growth and longevity of the sport, one of which was the involvement of sponsors (FIFA, 2007).

Although women’s sports have a comparatively clean image and remain relatively uncluttered in terms of sponsors, the predominant trend in corporate sponsorship is to stick with men’s sports (Lough & Irwin, 2001; Shaw & Amis, 2000). Shaw & Amis (2001) identified three factors that largely influence sponsorship decisions, which provide insight into this trend. These factors are value and belief structures that provide internal and external pressure on the organizations and managers, amount of media exposure, and mimetic pressures to minimize uncertainty. The first factor is perpetuated because sponsors seek out events and/or athletes that convey similar characteristics as the corporation. While ideal characteristics like power and success may seem to describe sports in general, the media more often attribute those characteristics to men’s sports rather than women’s. Media coverage, or lack thereof, is another reason why women’s sports are not as attractive to sponsors. Corporations and organizations sponsor sports and athletes in order to expose audiences to their brands. Men’s sports have the resources and media backing to draw larger audiences. Lastly, mimetic pressures to reduce uncertainty by reducing risk are most easily accomplished by doing what everyone else has done—sponsor men’s sports (Shaw & Amis, 2001). Although these factors only provide three possible reasons for the imbalance, it is clear that the overall mindset of sponsorship would have to change, which is no small feat, in order for women’s sports to catch up.

Based on the above literature, the first two research questions that guide this thesis are as follows:
RQ1: In the shared digital space, how do the sporting federation websites portray male and female athletics?

RQ1a: In what ways do sporting federations differ in positioning men and women?

RQ2: To what extent does the sporting federations’ use of images and videos reflect the membership and participation of female athletes?

RQ2a: To what extent do they differ in treatment of men and women?

The globalization of sports

According to the International Olympic Committee, a sport is eligible for Olympic selection if it is “widely practiced around the world” (2009). Given that the fight to get softball back into the Olympics requires an international effort, it is necessary to understand how modern sports gain international popularity. After all, the IOC president, Jacques Rogge, rationalized the decision to drop the sport saying it lacked “universal appeal” (Munro, 2008, para. 12). As a result it may prove fruitful to understand the roadblocks and possible implications softball, as an American sport, carries with it. As Rowe, McKay, and Miller (1998) clarify, some sports are intuitively associated with a place – soccer and Brazil, cricket and the West Indies, the Rugby Union and Wales and New Zealand, and ice hockey and Canada. Bale (2003) further explains, “Sports-place images are communicated by a variety of media including the press, television, radio, novels, and even poetry. Because we cannot personally visit all places and all regions at which sports are practiced we are dependant upon secondary sources for images of the sporting character of many parts of our own country and the world” (p. 161).
Diffusion of innovations

According to Bale (2003) the international diffusion of sport is generally associated with industrialism and colonialism. He compares the establishment of a modern sport in a new place to the adoption of an innovation (p. 46). One model of understanding the globalization of sport is by applying the concept of sports to Everett Rogers’ (1995) Diffusion of Innovations framework. According to this model, the spread of sports occurs in three broad stages. Initially, only a small number of adopters exist which then gives way to the ‘bandwagon’ effect, followed by the final stage where those lagging behind finally join in. The general idea is that once a sport establishes a federation and is placed in the public’s eye, its popularity will increase.

According to Rogers’ (1995) framework, geographic proximity and wealth of a nation, rather than possible reluctance play the largest roles in understanding the spread of a particular innovation. Because this theory is based on the discipline of geography, Bale (2003) finds limitations with its explanations because it does not leave room for cultural interpretations. Countries do not adopt sports at the same time, Bale points out that some form of a barrier must exist. Although some resistance may be attributed to geographic location, in this highly mediated world, Bale attributes this to the cultural implications attached to sports. Jones (1987) states that although sport is not always an implicit form of social control, it still provides political and social functions. Bale (2003) further attributes the diffusion of sport to its commodification and marketability.

British imperialism and Americanization

Miller, Lawrence, McKay, and Rowe (2001) also examined the globalization of sport. They looked to the two global powers (Britain and the United States) to understand how they are connected to the diffusion of sports around the globe. The early spread of modern sport has been
attributed to British colonialism, “Along with language, armed force, religious education and administration, British imperialism exported bats, balls, and a sporting ethos to the colonies” (p. 39). The United States, on the other hand, is associated with spreading sports through corporatization and the search for new profitable markets (p. 15). In fact, the very concept of globalization is often equated with Americanization. According to Maguire (1999):

American success on the sports field was matched by the diffusion of sports such as baseball, basketball, and volleyball. This American ability to develop their own sports, and to redefine the meaning of sports training, performance, and consumption, not only reflected the changing balance of political, economic, and cultural power in the world but also demonstrates how the diffusion of achievement sport was actively interpreted by occidental and non-occidental people (p. 209).

Scholars adhering to the “Americanization thesis” argue that the United States disrupts the natural global flow of culture and instead creates a one-way transmission through corporate channels. Sports examples of this phenomenon can be found in the popularity of Major League Baseball and the National Basketball Association in countries close to home such as Latin America and as far away as Japan and Australia. Maguire (1999) contends that because the American corporate model of sport (exemplified by the NFL and MLB) is dominant, other sports such as rugby and soccer are forced to adhere in order to survive (p. 147). Van Bottenburg and Wilterdink (2004) further explain that unlike of aspects of culture such as music, clothing, and food, sports are highly standardized by International Federations and therefore leave little room for cultural customization (p. 12).

Although an argument exists for the “Americanization” thesis, other scholars (Bigsby, 1975; Donnelley, 1996; Hebdige, 1982) dispute it on the basis that recipients are not powerless in the cultural exchange process. The “Americanization” thesis oversimplifies the relationship of sports, culture, and globalization. As mentioned before, some sort of barriers must exist in this
transfer process, because not all nations have adopted American sports. Not for the lack of trying, baseball has failed to catch on in Europe. However, in Australia T-ball (the entry sport to baseball and softball for young players) “is the most popular sport in primary schools” (Russel, 1993, para. 7).

Also relevant are ethnographic studies conducted in the Caribbean and Japan by Klein (1991) and Cooper (1998) respectively, who have found that although baseball is played by the same rules, the social connotations surrounding the game have been customized to suit the home nation’s culture. Relating this all back to softball can provide two interesting issues the sport may face in an international arena. Applying the Americanization thesis to the sport, the identity of softball is not positively associated with America and its dissemination relies on the United States’ companies’ ability to commodify it. On the other hand, softball may not find more international popularity because nations have the power to opt-out for any variety of reasons. Some countries are just not interested in buying what America is selling.

**The Westernized nature of the Olympics**

From the literature in this section, it is clear that sports, especially on an international level, are dominated by western nations. However, it is also evident that ‘western’ does not insinuate one unified group composed of Western European and North American countries. Although the United States has certainly gained dominance in actual athletic competition and financial influence, Europe—more specifically England—has long been considered the “cradle and focus of modern sporting life” (Dunning & Sheard, 1979; Gruneau, 1988; Guttmann, 1991; Maguire, 1999).

The Olympic games and the Olympic movement began in Europe and still adhere primarily to an obvious Eurocentric logic, composed of Western ideals and principles.
(MacAloon, 1996). King (2007) and Henry and Al-Tauqi (2008) further assert that the majority involved in organizing, participating, hosting, financing, and covering the Olympic games are from Europe or the Americas. With the exception of Australia, all Games have been held in the Northern Hemisphere and all but one IOC president has been European, the other was American. The current summer sports have all been developed from Western nations, with the exception of judo and tae kwan do and since Pierre de Coubertin’s presidency of the IOC, beginning in 1896, the Olympic Movement has, at its core, followed a colonial model (Henry & Al-Tauqi, 2008; King, 2007). Hargreaves (1992) explains that the Olympics are connected to the dominant world powers and that, “Olympism is thereby empowered to reward those who comply with its objectives, or withhold and penalize those who do not” (p. 122).

The IOC can exert this power in a number of ways, for example by excluding a nation from participating in the games for their treatment of citizens, such as South Africa, or from winning the bid to host the games, such is the case with Beijing back in 1993 following the protests at Tiananmen Square (Henry & Al-Tauqi, 2008), or possibly by the selection process of the included sports. More specifically relating to the issue at hand here, softball has not been as successful in gaining a strong following in Europe, as it has in other regions of the world and as Munro (2008) points out, Europe holds the largest block of votes within the IOC. George Vecesy (2008), a sport’s columnist for the *New York Times*, attributed the results of the voting to politics. As he explains, “…[the] vote was a definite shot at the new and unproven leadership of the United States Olympic Committee, which recently angered the IOC by initiating a domestic Olympic cable network” (para. 13). The network never came to fruition. The United States Olympic Committee put their plans on hold in August of 2009 after the IOC continued to oppose
the project and then in April 2010 the USOC abandoned the project all together (Sandomir, 2010).

**Power dynamics within the Olympic structure**

One of the key ways in which the IOC works to advance its mission and goals is to oversee and work with the other major players involved in making the Olympics happen: the National Olympic Committees (NOCs), the Organizing Committees for the Olympic Games (OCOGs), and the International Sporting Federations (IFs). Together they promote world sports and organize the Olympic games. Chappelet and Kuber-Mabbott (2008) explain:

…The extended Olympic system has become a vast network that encompasses a broad range of partners: public, private, and associative, and national, international, and transnational. No single partner really dominates world sport. All of them govern jointly, but have varying degrees of power and differing resources, meaning the equilibrium is a precious one” (p. 15).

The relationship between the IOC and the IFs are of particular importance.

As discussed earlier, the International Federations are responsible for supporting and advancing their sports on a global level (Chappelet & Kuber-Mabbott, 2008). Although they are all recognized by the IOC and are the governing body for their specific sport or disciplines, the various IFs do not have equal power. A large divide exists between powerful IFs (FIFA, IAAF, FIS, and the ISU)\(^1\) compared to the lesser-known federations. For some IFs, the Olympics are the largest world showcase for their sports such as gymnastics, track and field, curling, team handball, softball, etc… Other sports do not particularly need the Olympics; tennis has Wimbledon, soccer has the World Cup, baseball has the World Series and World Baseball Classic, and rugby has the Rugby World Cup (Vecsey, 2009). The power of the IFs are also

\(^1\) (FIFA) International Federation of Association Football, (IAAF) International Association of Athletics Federation, (FIS) International Ski Federation, and (ISU) International Skating Union
largely dependant on their media impact and whether or not they govern multiple sports or just one. According to Chappelet and Kuber-Mabbott (2008):

"Today, although a small number of IFs (e.g. the FIFA, UCI, or the IAAF) would be in a position to strike out on their own, since their world championships have a planetary impact that is comparable to or even greater than that of the Games, the others are fully aware that the Olympic Games remain the only real showcase for their sport in terms of its image – not to mention the broadcasting rights that all the IFs receive from the Games (p. 66)."

Softball remains a good example of the power inequality. Interestingly, despite claims that the game lacks global popularity, the softball federation has 126 national federation members, which is more than baseball, hockey, sailing, rowing, triathlon, or modern pentathlon (Munro, 2008).

"Overall the vast majority of the IFs need the IOC and vice versa. Whether the IFs need the Olympics to showcase their sport or the IOC needs the more powerful IFs to guarantee juggernaut-sized ratings during the Olympics, they remain in a constant state of negotiation trying to reach a consensus that will appease each side. This can be particularly complicated when it comes to the process of fighting for inclusion. For example, the International Baseball Federation is one of the sporting federations that has its own popular global event; however, even though the sport of baseball may have the potential to draw huge ratings, the image of the sport is riddled with doping scandals and the top athletes from the MLB do not commit to participation. In an effort to appear more Olympic friendly IBAF sought a female sporting counterpart to align themselves with but after being turned away from softball, they proposed the inclusion of the lesser known sport of women’s baseball (Longman, 2009). To counter baseball’s bid, the International Softball Federation also supported the idea for a men’s tournament in the Olympics. Don Porter, the president of the ISF also boasted softball’s impeccable drug-free record and made the case that all of the top athletes would participate. Furthermore, the sport of"
softball is also beginning to see growth in Africa and the Middle East, and the United States’ dominance was dashed by Japan in 2008 (Brennan, 2010; Longman, 2008).

Women’s ski jumping has also been wrapped up in issues of inclusion. The International Ski Federation is considered one of the more dominant federations and has supported the bid for inclusion but some of the female ski jumpers do not feel that the federation has been the most enthusiastic advocate (Thomas, 2010). A comment made back in 2005 on National Public Radio by the FIS president, Gian Franco Kasper, was particularly controversial to the cause. Referring specifically to women’s ski jumping, he was quoted saying, “[the sport] seems not to be appropriate for ladies from a medical point of view” (as quoted in Thomas, 2010a, para. 17). Karate was another sport rejected for inclusion in the 2016 London games. The sport was lobbying for both male and female competition but came up short in the votes. The chief executive of the National Karate-Do Federation, Luke St. Onge, knew that Karate fell victim to the business side of the Olympics. “Rugby and golf are money-intensive. I’m not saying it’s wrong, but for television those two sports would be much more attractive than if we were there” (Klein, 2009, para. 10).

Taking into consideration the literature reviewed in this section, the third research questions is:

RQ3: To what extent do the web pages appeal to an international audience?

RQ3a: To what extent, if any, do the websites reflect a Eurocentric, an Americanized, or overall Western perspective of international sports?

Public relations

As mentioned earlier, sporting federations are not completely passive in the creation and maintenance of their identities and relationships. While external forces such as gender and
international politics certainly contribute, the act of public relations allows individuals and groups the opportunity to communicate and negotiate their desired identity. According to Curtin and Gaither (2007), “Public relations is a communicative process; that is, it involves some form of communication, whether it be written, verbal, or neither, as a purposeful choice, and it is a process” (p. 6). A more relevant and specific definition of international public relations is provided by Wilcox, Cameron, Ault, and Agee (2000), “International public relations may be defined as the planned and organized effort of a company, institution, or government to establish mutually beneficial relations with the publics of other nations” (p.516). In this study, the focus is on the use of international public relations on the Internet. As Cutlip, Center and Broom (2000) explain, “the digital world has changed communication within organizations and between organizations and their various publics” (p. 285). Many studies have discussed and examined the power of the Internet as a public relations tool and recognize its potential to provide large audiences and serve as an alternative media outlet for organizations to reach desired publics (Esrock & Leichty, 1998; Hallahan, 2001; Johnson, 1997; Selvin, 2000).

Public relations & sports

According to L’Etang (2006), “Sport is a microcosm of social life which reveals underlying values and power relations and is an arena in which issues emerge. Since agency and action are facilitated by communicative action, sports demand attention from PR analysts” (p. 389). While sports employ various public relations and marketing strategies to promote their events, athletes, and brands, sports can simultaneously be used to promote something else entirely. Sports are “powerful cultural agents” that can be used to promote a nation, a social movement, a group or national identity, and specific values (L’Etang, 2006, p. 387). Roche (2000) Zauhar (2004) explains that the Olympics and other similar mega-events (the
Commonwealth Games, the Special Olympics, the Paralympics) are not only publicized as a source of entertainment but are also deliberately intertwined with identities reflecting a nationality, legitimacy, and ability for example.

Similarly, sports can promote and be promoted by lifestyles and individuals. Lifestyle sports such as surfing, kayaking, and skateboarding are associated with values made salient through mainstream marketing, commerce, and public relations (L’Etang, 2006). Through these strategies, a sport like skateboarding can become synonymous with values such as rebellion and coolness. Just as sports are connected with lifestyle values, so are superstar athletes. In the corporate promotional culture of sports, sports stars can be bought and sold through endorsements, merchandise, and symbolism (Andrews & Jackson, 2001; Gilchrist, 2005). Despite the many facets of sports and public relations, many scholars agree that more research is needed (Curtin and Gaither, 2005; L’Etang, 2006; Neupauer, 2001).

Public relations & the Internet

An essential aspect of online public relations is building relationships through strategic communication. According to Kelleher (2007), good strategic communication is “purposeful and goal-directed” and online media systems should not be viewed solely as online representations but as, “tools used by real people trying to achieve goals and objectives within the context of the organizations” (p. 18). Sporting federations, like any other organization, partake in relationship building with a variety of publics in order to exist. Because they have multiple audiences the federations rely on public relations techniques to communicate with them. For example, sporting federations work with various media outlets, the International Olympic Committee (IOC), local communities / entire nations, and sports fans just to name a few. Because each group has a different relationship with the sporting federation, the difficulty lies in figuring out how to
maintain these relationships through a singular, shared global space, such as a website. Maynard and Tian (2004) explain, “Globalization simultaneously creates tendencies towards some degree of cultural (structural) homogenization while at the same time encourages people to identify more strongly with their ethnic or national grouping” (p. 287). Additionally, publics can be broken down into even smaller groups depending on their role in or relationship to the organization. A study conducted by Esrock and Leichte (2000) identified several groups that companies specifically target through their web content. A few examples include the press, investors, prospective employees, and customers. Their findings indicate that the type and prominence of content on the homepage is useful in identifying the primary public the site aims to reach.

According to Wright (2001) and Kent and Taylor (1998), the Internet inherently facilitates communication and relationship building and is thus a useful tool in public relations. Although they were discussing activist groups’ use of the Internet, there is no reason why the Internet would not function similarly for sporting federations. Like activist groups, sporting federations interact with a variety of audiences and actively work to promote their organization’s mission. In a follow up study to Kent & Taylor (1998), Taylor et al. (2001) stresses the importance of building and maintaining a membership base in order to have power. Like activist groups, sporting federations depend on a strong membership base consisting of players, fans, and sponsors. This is extremely pertinent in this case because the focus is on sports that have achieved Olympic status and therefore require an extensive and international membership base.

In order to understand public relations and relationship building online, it is essential to first understand the structure and technological implications of the web. Kelleher (2007) describes the online universe as a series of subsystems embedded within suprasystems. His
explanation of the Internet is based on the understanding that the web is a system consisting of interrelated parts. Each part, individual websites in this instance, are then suprasystems with all pages within the site’s URL being subsystems. For example, the entirety of the International Softball Federation website would be considered a suprasystem but each category found within the site such as news, events, or the merchandise pages would be subsystems that exist within the ISF website as a whole. Kelleher (2007) further explains that although a hierarchy exists, through the use of hyperlinks, websites do not have to be navigated from top to bottom. However, it is still essential to provide the target audience with an easy way of locating the information they came to the site looking for. This is especially relevant to organizations that are looking to bolster relationships with their publics (Kelleher, 2007). One of the ways organizations can achieve this is through the use of certain features such as a FAQs page, forums, and other prominent spaces that cater to the needs of the desired public.

Media richness also plays a role in relationship building and effective communication. Media richness is the degree to which various media platforms are capable of conveying information by taking into account the possibility for feedback, available cues, focus of source, and language variety (Daft & Lengel, 1984). “Although face-to-face communication is still the gold standard, having access to richer media makes work easier for those trying to establish and maintain relationships online. Of course, both the public relations practitioner and the people she wants to communicate with must have access for these technologies to work” (Kelleher, 2007, p. 61).

**Dialogical communication**

According to some scholars (Kent & Taylor, 1998; Mazzini, 2004; Reber & Kim, 2006) relationship building on the Internet is best done through dialogical communication. Dialogical
communication is a “particular type of relational interaction” and defined as “any negotiated exchange of ideas and opinions” (Kent & Taylor, 1998, p. 325). Kent and Taylor (1998) further explain, “The Web provides public relations practitioners an opportunity to create dynamic and lasting relationships with publics, however, to do so requires that dialogic loops be incorporated into Web-pages and Webbed communication” (p. 325). More importantly, they also proposed five principals to assist in the assimilation of dialogical communication on the Internet. They are: The Dialogic Loop, the Usefulness of Information, the Generation of Return Visits, the Intuitiveness/Ease of the Interface, and the Rule of Conservation of Visitors.

According to Kent and Taylor (1998), the Dialogical loop is a space for two-way communication between the website visitors and organization. A frequently asked question section or offering a contact email address are two examples; however, Kent and Taylor stress that the loop must be closed, meaning that someone from the organization should be communicating back (p. 327). The Usefulness of the Information principle pertains to how relevant the various online content is to all users. Understanding that the website will be used by a variety of audiences is important when deciding what and where content will be placed online. Creating a website that is useful and updated often appeals to the principal of the Generation of Return Visitors. According to Kent and Taylor (1998), “Sites that contain constantly updated and "valuable" information for publics appear credible and suggest that an organization is responsible” (p. 329). The Intuitiveness/Ease of the Interface sounds obvious but it is very important for websites to be user friendly and easy to navigate. The very structure of the site determines what information is available to the visitor and can influence the decision to revisit the website. Lastly the Rule of Conservation of Visitors specifically deals with the possible over-use of web ads and links. Kent and Taylor (1998) rationalize that these features can act as
distractions but also potentially lead visitors away from the site earlier than intended (p. 331). Organizations who use more dialogical features offer more communication opportunities, which in turn foster the potential to build trust and commitment between audiences and itself (Kent & Taylor, 1998).

Based on this research, the fourth research question is:

**RQ4:** To what extent do the sporting federations’ web pages employ the five principles of dialogical communication?

**Framing used by the media & sports**

Besides utilizing website features, sporting federations also have the ability to communicate their agendas through the use of framing. Most commonly associated with the media, framing is also used for public relations by organizations and businesses, and also occurs on the individual level. According to the definition provided by Entman (1993), framing “is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation and/or treatment recommendation of the item described” (p. 52). Derived from the work of Goffman (1974), framing occurs throughout the communicative process and is enacted through the inclusion and / or exclusion of information. Individuals use framing, consciously and unconsciously, to produce and interpret daily social interactions (Hallahan, 1999; Pan & Kosicki, 1993). While frames are not universal, many are culturally shared, making it possible for different audiences to reach a similar interpretation (Baylor, 1996; Entman, 1993). Reese (2003) explains, “…[frames are] organizing principles that are socially shared and persistent over time, that work symbolically to meaningfully structure the social world” (p. 11).
Framing occurs in a variety of communicative processes and stages, the four most prominent are the receiver, text, communicator, and culture (Entman, 1993). Within media studies, the focus tends to be on framing used within a text (Durham, 1998; Entman, 1991; Gamson & Modigliani, 1989; Gandy & Li, 2005). The IOC and the sporting federations all utilize framing techniques. While texts vary, in this instance, a text generally refers to a television segment, a magazine story, a newspaper article, or the content on a website as is the case with the sports federations. Another crucial element to understanding framing, relevant to this study, is the way frames are understood in the context of power. According to critical framing analysts, media frames tend to represent the dominant ideals of a society and are therefore naturalized and are perpetuated, usually at the expense of subordinate groups such as minorities and women (Akhavan-Majid & Ramaprasad, 2000; Carragee and Roefs; 2004; D’Angelo, 2002).

The world of sports has their own set of go-to frames, to be used in and by the media. For example, Zaharopoulo’s (2007) study found that the Olympics commonly attempt to frame stories that promote Olympian values such as ‘peace and friendship’ and ‘world unity’ through its promotional efforts. However, the media has demonstrated a history of employing their own set of frames to up ratings, sell papers, and align the values of the Games with their own. The self-serving interests of the media not only re-frames sporting stories but also, on occasion, prevents them from being critical of sporting institutions (Delaney & Eckstein, 2008). Although the Olympics are not as concerned about the concept of amateurism as they once were (Miller, 2003, p. 255), another study about the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) explains how the organization commonly uses communitas and corporatas frames in an effort to negotiate their position as an amateur athletic association and a commercialized business (Boyd
& Stahley, 2008). The findings of this study may be relevant to understanding the unique position of the IFs, as non-profits directly associated with the Olympic games and an integral part of the global sporting industry.

Taking into consideration the framing literature discussed above, the fifth research question is:

**RQ5: What frames emerge from interacting with sporting federation websites?**

**Organizations & impression management strategies**

In addition to framing, groups like international sporting federations may also employ impression management strategies in order to maintain and communicate desired attributes. Most simply, impression management is defined as the “attempt to control images that are projected in real or imagined social interactions” (Schlenker, 1980, p. 6). Connolly-Ahern and Broadway (2007) add, “All people and corporations engage in impression management in an attempt to increase the chances that they will be able to fulfill their financial and social goals, secure cooperation or support from others, vie effectively with or discourage competitors, and avoid the consequences of negative action” (p. 343). Early research, led by Goffman (1959), focused on impression management used by individuals. According to Goffman, impression management is utilized in order to “convey an impression to others which it is in his interest to portray” (p. 4). Schlenker (1980) further added that the process of impression management is continual and dynamic but also a completely normal human behavior. Building off of Goffman’s foundational work, Jones’s (1990) research led to the identification of five strategies of impression management: Ingratiation to be perceived as likeable through self deprecation, humor, and saying positive things about others; Intimidation to convey authority and power through the use of threats; Competence to display skills and qualifications by discussing experience and
accomplishments; *Exemplification* to be perceived as being morally superior through a long standing commitment or dedication to a cause, and *Supplication* to appear sympathetic and in need so others will offer their support.

Tice, et al. (1995) further explains that the targeted person or audience is also relevant to the implementation of these strategies. Although their study was limited to self-presentation to friends and strangers, international sporting federations may similarly use the varying strategies to display different sides of their organization to the players and referees, fans, or the media. Findings by Dominick (1999) lend credence to this assertion that the audience matters, “In order for self-presentation to be most effective, it must be tailored to the perceived values and preferences of the target” (p. 655).

Using these five impression management strategies, Dominick (1999) investigated their application to the Internet and personal home pages. Although Dominick’s (1999) research still focused on the individual, he states, “A personal web page can be viewed as a carefully constructed self presentation” (p. 674). It is not a stretch to assume that entities, like the sporting federations, would also use web pages as a form of self-presentation, just on a grander scale. Applying Goffman’s original concepts to electronic communication, more specifically personal home pages, Miller (1995) proposed that as technology developed electronic communication would become just as rich as everyday face-to-face interactions. And although verbal and written communication is the primary method of impression management, Leary and Kowalski (1990) identified a variety of additional resources that can be used such as non-verbal/stylistic features, associations with others, and physical appearance. In terms of the international sporting federations’ web pages, language, visual cues, and sponsors/partners are the most likely elements in which the impression management strategies are implemented. Connolly-Ahern and
Broadway (2007) investigated corporations’ use of impression management strategies on their websites. Their study demonstrated that corporations were most likely to utilize strategies of competence and exemplification. They explain that these two characteristics are important to a corporation’s image because they convey expertise and trustworthiness. Although the sports federations are not corporations, expertise and trustworthiness are still fundamental elements to the organizations’ success.

This literature informed the sixth research question:

**RQ6:** Which impression management strategies are most likely to be used by the sports federations?

Based on the above literature, it is clear that softball’s Olympic elimination is a result of a variety of complex and entangled factors. Like any other sport, softball is embedded within larger issues of gender and global politics; however, softball is in a difficult position as it is a predominantly female team sport. Although softball is not considered safely feminine, in terms of team sports it the “real thing” because women compete at the game’s highest international level. Perhaps the lack of comfort with softball’s gender identity led the sport to become associated with baseball, which presumably did not help ISF’s cause. Additionally, the ISF is not one of the more powerful federations within the Olympic movement and is very possibly weakened by its lack of support from Western European nations. It appears that the way the media has handled the sport has been to perpetuate hegemonic masculinity while reinforcing femininity through exclusion or by utilizing the framing techniques mentioned above. Neither method works towards equity or legitimization of women’s sports and female athletes.

Although the focus here is on softball, its issues are not unique to the sport. The issues examined here are major societal problems existing on a global scale. Although no group or
organization possesses the ability to simply make the necessary changes to the sporting world, the federations do have one point of control. Through the websites, each sporting federation has the opportunity to address these issues and influence the agenda. That is what is of interest here, understanding how each federation utilizes its unmediated public space.
Chapter 3
Methodology

A qualitative content analysis was conducted in order to examine the international sporting federations’ websites. A qualitative, rather than quantitative content analysis was deemed appropriate in this instance because the purpose of the study is to understand the ‘why’ and ‘how’ in addition to the ‘what’ and ‘how many’ (McDowell, 2004; Morgan, 1993). As Altheide (1996) explains, “The goal of qualitative research is to understand the process and character of social life and to arrive at meaning and process; we seek to understand types, characteristics, and organizational aspects of the documents as social products in their own right, as well as what they claim to represent” (p. 42). Additionally, as Morgan (1993) explains, “One research goal that is particularly well matched to the strengths of qualitative content analysis is comparative analysis” (p. 119).

Both textual and visual elements of the websites were analyzed and coded using an inductive iterative approach. This allowed observations to emerge from the text after repeatedly navigating the top layers of the websites. Prior to coding, several initial visits to each site were made to get a feel for their layouts, to try out their available features, and to overall become familiar with each of the federations. Pre-identified frames from the literature review were used as preliminary guides, which helped to develop an initial coding scheme and to later identify emerging themes and frames. To do this, qualitative content analysis relies on systematic coding in addition to close reading of the data. Morgan (1993) explains, “These counts are a way to summarize the patterns within what is often a unique data set, as opposed to the very different goals involved in either generalization to larger populations or tests of statistical inference” (p. 116). According to Kracauer (1952), qualitative content analysis enables multiple readings of a
text; however, meaning is not simply arrived at through one’s opinion but through a critical analysis.

Sample

The focus of this study is on the International Softball Federation but in order to perform a comparative analysis other sports federations needed to be included. I decided to identify comparable women’s team sports, currently on the Olympic program, to include in this analysis. Utilizing a comparative analysis benefited the nature of this study because it allowed shortcomings and differences of the ISF’s online presence to be illuminated. The existing Olympic sports were used as benchmarks to identify the various techniques employed by each of the federations to engage their various audiences. The criteria used in the selection process is as follows: the sports had to be played by both men and women; the sport had to be a team sport in nature (consisting of more than two people); the format of the sport included head to head competition (not a race); and finally, the outcome of the competition is not determined by judges. Using the official Olympic website (http://www.olympic.org/en/) as a resource for identifying all current winter and summer sports played by both men and women, the sample included the following four sports: basketball, soccer, volleyball, and ice hockey. To remain consistent and to prevent confusion, soccer will always be referred to as such. Any use of the word football by the federation or any other literature will be replaced with the word soccer in brackets like so: [soccer]. It is also important to note that the sport of curling also fits the criteria outlined above; however, within the United States it is considered a fringe sport and many Americans, such as myself, are only exposed to the game every four years during the Winter Olympics. It does not have the same presence in schools or in the mainstream media as the other sports identified. To obtain the web addresses to the official sporting federation websites for softball (ISF), basketball
(FIBA), soccer (FIFA), volleyball (FIVB), and ice hockey (IIHF) the official Olympic website was consulted again.

Table 3-1: Sports federations’ abbreviations and URLs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sport</th>
<th>Federation</th>
<th>Website</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Softball</td>
<td>ISF- International Softball Federation</td>
<td><a href="http://www.internationalsoftball.com/">http://www.internationalsoftball.com/</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volleyball</td>
<td>FIVB- International Federation of Volleyball</td>
<td><a href="http://www.fivb.ch/">http://www.fivb.ch/</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ice Hockey</td>
<td>IIHF- International Ice Hockey Federation</td>
<td><a href="http://www.iihf.com/iihf-home/home.html">http://www.iihf.com/iihf-home/home.html</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basketball</td>
<td>FIBA- International Basketball Federation</td>
<td><a href="http://www.fiba.com/">http://www.fiba.com/</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soccer</td>
<td>FIFA- International Federation of Association Football</td>
<td><a href="http://www.fifa.com/">http://www.fifa.com/</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data Collection

Before fully explaining my method, I find it important to note my inherent biases coming into the coding process. I am a female sports fan. While I enjoy both men and women’s sports, I have been a long-time fan of softball. I have played the game recreationally for the last sixteen years. Additionally, I would categorize myself as a casual fan of the other sports investigated here. The majority of my experiences with these sports have been mediated through televised sports but I have also attended a few women’s sporting events in person.

In order to preserve continuity and consistency, the first three levels of each website were downloaded from the Internet to my computer’s hard drive. This was deemed a necessary step in the process because websites can rapidly change due to frequent updates, various events occurring, and the level of community engagement on the website. The free-to-download software, SiteSucker\(^2\), was used to download these sites and enable offline browsing. For the sake of consistency all the websites were consecutively captured on the same day—Wednesday, 

\(^2\) Sitesucker was selected because it was compatible with a Mac operating system and free. The official website is: [http://www.sitesucker.us/home.html](http://www.sitesucker.us/home.html)
April 14, 2010. Borrowing from the site mapping scheme used by Dimitrova et al. (2003), the links on the top three levels of each website were coded for the following: type of link (image, text, video), destination of the link, and the prominence of the position of the link. Within the destination category, links leading to internal and external pages were made note of and in the case of internal links, the specific page was also recorded. Prominence was broken into high, medium, and low subcategories. A high prominence link demanded the most attention on a page, possibly because of its size, location, and movement. A low prominence link on the other hand was described as small, usually just text, and commonly positioned towards the bottom of the page. All other links were then categorized as medium.

To investigate the research questions, additional coding procedures were necessary. Website links were also coded for gender. By gender, I refer to the subject of the link and whether it was related to male athletics, female athletics, both, or if it was neutral. Photo and video links were also coded for gender when applicable. In the case of photos and videos, the gender was noted as well as what the individuals/teams were doing (playing, hugging, posed or candid, etc.). The neutral category was understood as links having to do with the organization as a whole or any other topic that was not directly related to male or female athletics. Any interesting or noteworthy details were also recorded in an ‘other’ category. Repetitive or duplicate links were coded as such and labeled ‘repeat.’ Lastly, shortly after completing the coding process for each website I typed up a set of ‘field notes’ that included rich descriptions of the websites, my impression of the site, and any other details that stood out from the process.

After coding the websites, the data collected from the sitemap was useful in identifying information such as where women were located on the sites and how much of the websites’ space was allotted to each gender. Features used to employ any of the five principles of
dialogical communication were also apparent after the first systematic visit. Repeat visits to the websites, aided by the completed coding sheets, were made to further investigate the research questions that involved a closer look. Questions regarding international audiences, framing, and impression management each required additional scrutiny of the websites. Although an inductive approach was used to allow themes and frames to emerge organically, the frames regarding the treatment of women, which were identified in the literature review, served as preliminary guides. While each question was dealt with separately, a conscious effort was made to understand how each of these aspects worked in unison towards the sporting federations’ communicative goals.
Chapter 4

Findings

The coding and data analysis process occurred for just over one week, between April 15th and April 24th, 2010. Each website was repeatedly and systematically navigated until each research question had been thoroughly investigated. Themes and frames identified during this process were further examined and collapsed down until an understanding of the sports federation websites had been obtained. In order to more fruitfully compare and contrast these websites it is useful to explain the general characteristics of a sports federation website. Each of the federation websites included in this thesis provided the recent news and scores, information about upcoming and past events, a section dedicated to the organization, and information about their sport such as its history, rules, and game fundamentals. All other aspects of the websites varied in either existence or quantity.

Gender portrayal

Research question one asked, in the shared digital space, how do the sporting federation websites portray male and female athletes? A sub question asked, in what ways do the sports federations differ? During the coding process, it was apparent that a broad spectrum of visibility regarding female athletes existed between the federations’ websites. All of the sporting federations offered information about teams, tournaments, and related news, but the task of locating the information about female athletes was more difficult on some sites than it was on others. It was no surprise that information about women was the most abundant and easily found on the ISF website. Unlike the other four sports included in this analysis, at softball’s highest international level, only women played the sport. The FIVB website provided a dichotomy of
shared space between men and women while the IIHF, FIBA, and FIFA fell on the opposite end of the spectrum. Men dominated those sites and any information regarding women was generally positioned behind or after the corresponding men’s version.

**Women dominate softball**

A variety of information, photos, and videos pertaining to women’s softball was abundant on the ISF website. All three of the featured upcoming events were for women (or girls) and the featured stories in the “Latest News” section were either about the sport of softball overall or focused on women athletes and women’s teams. This trend continued into the “Latest News Archive” page. All twelve feature stories from this year either focused on women’s softball or made mention of both men and women. Those that dealt with both male and female athletes discussed them together in the context of developing the game in new geographic areas such as Africa and South America, the importance of teaching youth players the fundamentals, and the ways in which softball can be a lifelong sport. The feature story from February 12, 2010 entitled “Historic Discipline Continues Its Legacy” is one such example. The article provides dates for upcoming tournaments and explains that the game’s variety of modified versions such as indoor, wheelchair, beach, and slow pitch, which is most commonly played by individuals between the ages of 35 and 70, can be played by almost anyone. There was not a single story dedicated to men’s softball only.

Interestingly, it was difficult to find any information on or links to the ISF’s “Back Softball” initiative. Within the first three levels of the website, only two hyperlinks led to back softball.com. The first, located on the second level of the site, was within a featured news story about a young female softball player who is about to enter college and the second link was in the message board page under the topic “Support Olympic Softball” located on the third level.
**Volleyball: An equal opportunity website**

Both men and women play the sport of volleyball. The featured news and headlines were about both men and women players and competitions. A considerable amount of current news revolved around the FIVB Board of Administration; however, this is most likely due to the fact that the date of data collection coincided with the FIVB annual meeting. However, the rest of the articles and pages on the website offered similar information and features about men and women. For example, pages for the men’s World League, the women’s World Gran Prix, and the men and women’s 2010 World Championships discussed logistics of the tournament, what players had been named to the starting squads, and results from recent matches. Typical sporting stories about victorious underdogs or dominating performances were present in both men and women’s articles. For example, the news story “Sidorenko and Dyachenko come out on top in latest leg of Asian Beach Volleyball Championship” discussed how both the winning men’s and women’s beach volleyball teams destroyed their opponents in a quick 37 minutes and 40 minutes respectively. Another story, “Unilever overcome catastrophe to take Brazilian Superliga semifinal to tie-breaker,” is about a women’s indoor team that continued to advance through their tournament despite facing several obstacles prior to the event.

Links for the upcoming competitions for men and women were easily located on the homepage, centered directly below the featured news section. Two were for men’s indoor (the World League & the 2010 World Championship), two were for women’s indoor (the World Gran Prix & the 2010 World Championship), two were for youth tournaments, one was for both men and women’s beach volleyball (SWATCH FIVB World Tour 2010) and the last one was for the 2009 Men’s Club Championship. Each event page included similar features such as a list of
participating teams, match schedules, photo galleries, honors, and links to past competitions. Additionally, both men and women’s event pages for the World Championships also offered a link to the opposite sex’s tournament page, which further increased the ease of locating information for either gender.

While gender equity was a feature of the FIVB website, format equity was not. Upon closer inspection of the website a dichotomy between gender and the two variations of volleyball became apparent. On the SWATCH World Tour page, the default information is for women’s beach volleyball. A text link on the left hand side brought up the men’s information. This was especially surprising and different from the other pages on this site and all the other websites, with the exception of the ISF. In comparison, links pertaining to indoor volleyball positioned men and women separately but equally. For example, links to the “Calendar”, “World Rankings”, and “Competitions” for indoor volleyball provided information and for both genders and was organized in chronological order rather than in a hierarchy of gender.

**Women are the minority in ice hockey**

On the IIHF homepage, out of the 31 links, only two resulted in any kind of information about women’s ice hockey. Both of those links were text only and off to the side under the “Scores” and “More Headlines” sections. Additionally, all four upcoming ice hockey tournaments promoted on the home page were men’s only. The imbalance of news could be attributed to the current lack of women’s events. According to the IIHF, there is no Women’s World Championship played the same year as the Olympics. So, with the exception of the Winter Games in 2010, there is only one event for women compared to the three for men. In order to locate information about women’s ice hockey it was necessary to first click on the “Championships” tab, located on the top menu bar. On that page links were then provided to past
events where men and women’s tournaments were listed. It was within those pages that information for women’s ice hockey could be found, which is three to four levels down from the IIHF homepage.

Although it was difficult to find information about women’s ice hockey on the homepage, the federation’s treatment of men and women was surprisingly analogous throughout the rest of the website. Once the web pages with women’s information were located on the site, a plethora of news stories, statistics, and team rosters were available just as they were on the men’s pages. Player statistics for both men and women included scoring leaders, face-off leaders, most penalized players, and goalkeepers shot versus save percentages (SVS%). The only noticeable difference between features available for men and women was that the men’s tournament page included a link for “TV Listings”. Five different networks broadcasted one or some of the games; however, none were available for viewing in the United States.

The IIHF’s web pages dedicated to the recently concluded 2010 Vancouver Winter Olympics provided further evidence about the federation’s gender balance in terms of quality of men and women’s coverage. The pages allocated to the Olympic games were for both men and women and could be found under the “Championships” tab on the main menu bar. Any section or feature when clicked on provided an option tab to see that information for either gender. The tabs were centrally located above the content and stereotypically color coded, blue for men and pink for women. Regardless of the colors assigned to the buttons, the information about men and women’s ice hockey was handled in a balanced way in terms of space and position. Compared with the homepage, the Olympics section was vastly different in terms of presence and physical positioning of women within the sport. Judging from the homepage, unless a visitor was specifically looking for news about women’s ice hockey or diligently read every news link, it
would be difficult to tell that women even played the sport. However, upon seeing the Olympic pages and even seeing how robust the other tournament pages were, it is possible that women ice hockey players are not unfairly portrayed or underrepresented but that they are simply outnumbered and are really a minority in the sport of ice hockey.

**Men dominate basketball**

Like the IIHF website, women were difficult to locate on the FIBA site. On the homepage and within the various news sections, most of the recent articles pertained to either the upcoming Men’s World Championship, which begins in August, or the recently finished 2010 Men’s NCAA March Madness tournament. The Women’s World Championship begins only one week after the Men’s Championship concludes and the Women’s NCAA March Madness tournament coincided with the men’s tournament. However, out of the ten featured news stories on the homepage, only one had anything to do with women’s basketball. Articles focusing on men discussed which athletes would be playing in the World Championship tournament, one announced the appointment of a new coach for Lebanon, and the remaining few were general stories revolving around the upcoming World Tournament. The only news item to even mention the Women’s World Tournament was a press release that announced that the application process for gaining media accreditation was now open.

Other news features such as the “Columns” and “Blogs” were similarly focused primarily on men’s basketball. Many of the writers, all male, discussed the NCAA March Madness games and brackets; however, only the men’s tournament was given attention and out of the ten most recent posts, women were nowhere to be found. On the second layer of the website, of the nine most recent “Off the Court” articles, only two made references to female basketball players. In the first story, about a beach basketball tournament in Rio de Janeiro, a young Brazilian female
player was quoted. The other article was about a female Canadian player who was using her personal blog to call attention to the relief efforts in Haiti after the devastating earthquake. Women were mentioned in a few other stories but they were referenced to as girlfriends of players or fans in love with an NBA player from Spain. The one news portion that proved the exception to the gender imbalance was the FIBA “Press Releases” section. The number of press releases dealing with men and women’s basketball was almost equal.

The underrepresentation of women in soccer

When navigating around the FIFA website it was easy to locate information about men’s soccer. The latest news, scores, ranking, tournaments, photos, and videos are all easily linked to from the homepage. The same cannot be said about women’s soccer. Most information and features pertaining to women were located on the second or third levels of the FIFA website. According to FIFA, “Today, some 26 million women and girls play [soccer] and one in every ten [soccer] players on the planet is female.” The website however does not seem to accurately represent the percentage of women players FIFA claims to exist. For example, the link to the next Women’s FIFA World Cup is literally buried underneath the link to the Men’s World Cup. All the event links are within one box but are arranged on top of each other. Arrows on both sides of the box allow users to scroll through the pile to see each event. The Men’s World Cup link is defaulted to the top but the Women’s World Cup link can only be located after scrolling completely to the right.

Attempting to find any other information about women’s soccer was a similarly difficult task. Only one story on the homepage, found under both the “About FIFA” and “More News” sections, related to women. The article was entitled “Eye-catching girls enhance allure” and discussed how many female soccer players like fashion, pose in magazines, and wear makeup. It
goes on to provide specific examples, “Swiss women’s international Ana Maria Crnogorcevic was not crowned the Bundesliga’s best-looking footballer by German newspaper Bild for nothing. The 19-year-old Hamburg talent agreed to a body-paint photo shoot with the tabloid, bearing the HSV diamond on her torso and leaving little to the imagination” (para. 3). For the 2008 Olympics the Chinese Women’s team painted their fingernails the colors of the Olympic rings. The article then went on to explain that women athletes like to be stylish, “Nor can China PR forward Han Duan deny a penchant for clothes and cosmetics, with the 26-year-old Los Angeles Sol player admitting to spending a large portion of her income on beauty care” (para. 7). This particular story was the only one out of the fifty most recent news items.

The homepage did provide one more link to a section entitled “Women’s [Soccer]”. It was however, located at the very bottom of the page, within the site map. Content and links found under the “Women’s [Soccer]” section, located on the second level of the website, included a few news headlines, links to the next women’s events, a listing of the top three women’s teams, links to the “Women’s [Soccer] – Mission & Goals”, “Health and Fitness of the Female Player”, and the “Women’s [Soccer] Resource Kit”.

For the most part, just about every other page on the site either focused on or defaulted to information and statistics regarding the organization as a whole or to men’s soccer. For example, besides the traditional news articles, the “News Centre” also has a section entitled “The Interview,” where athletes and other individuals connected to FIFA are, obviously, interviewed. Taking a look back through the last fifty interviews, not a single woman was interviewed. Even though the default or display items were for men’s soccer, it did not mean that additional information about women’s soccer did not exist on the website. Information about women and
soccer was located on the second and third levels of the site. Women have a place, albeit a supporting role, in the online world of FIFA.

**Featured players were not women**

While the ISF, FIVB, and IIHF websites provided plenty of interesting data, specifically pertaining to women, the FIBA and FIFA websites were more remarkable in what was *not* present. Both sites heavily favored men and significant differences in the pages designated for men and women were apparent. On each of the homepages women were barely present, most other pages defaulted to information or features pertaining to men. The women’s event pages had fewer features than the men’s event pages. Additionally it seems that men were treated as individuals on these pages, as both FIFA and FIBA provided links and features highlighting superb athletes and individual players; however, women tended to be discussed as a team or as national representatives.

For example, the FIBA 2010 men and women’s World Championship tournaments are to take place this summer, within one week of each other. All of the upcoming event pages include a section for the latest news, a countdown to the event, a complete listing of the countries participating in the tournament, the latest posts from the fan page and links to tournament information available via Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and FIBA Mobile. One major discrepancy between the men and women’s pages were found. The men’s world championship page included sections that spotlighted individual athletes and national teams. These additional sections were located towards the bottom of the page but offered further insight and interactivity for basketball fans. The “Focus On” section offered a closer look into one of the qualified national teams while the “Key Player”, “Rising Star”, and “Legend” sections highlighted
individual players for their achievements. These sections linked to their profile page or team profile page where one could learn even more about them. There was also a customizable feature called “My Players” that allowed FIBA members to keep tabs on and see game statistics for their favorite players. No such features were found on the women’s championship pages. In fact very little information about specific players could be found without going a few levels deeper into the site. For example, to find information about individual female players, a visitor would have to do the following: go to the women’s event page, click on the teams’ link to load the qualified teams and their roster, and then click on the individual player of interest. In contrast, the men’s page provided the list of teams and their rosters as well as player charts, accumulated statistics, and a search function easily accessible from the main event page.

The FIFA website is extremely similar to the FIBA website in terms of site layout and features provided. The 2010 men and 2011 women’s World Cup pages did share some similar features such as latest news, ticketing, and destination information. Unlike the women’s World Cup page, the men’s page included a countdown, a section spotlighting different qualified teams, and an interactive collectible sticker album of male soccer stars for FIFA Club members to collect and trade.

**Gender in visuals**

The second research question asked, to what extent do the sporting federations’ use of images and videos reflect the membership base of female athletes and in what ways do they differ? On each of the homepages, a variety of photos were visible, either as part of the website’s banner/header or accompanying other links. The FIVB, IIHF, FIBA, and FIFA homepages also included an embedded video or video player and the ISF homepage provided a link to their
YouTube channel. With the exception of the IIHF, all the other federations’ videos provided highlights of game play. There were also many photo galleries and videos available on each of the federation websites for men and women. Most often, the galleries were linked to or embedded on the homepage or within an event page to provide visual highlights of a game, match, tournament, or competition. As discussed at length in previous sections, softball showcased the most female athletes and events followed by volleyball, ice hockey, basketball, and soccer. This trend was apparent in the visual elements of the websites as well. There were plenty of action photos and footage within the event pages and multimedia sections. Other candid photos, of both genders, included pictures of the victorious team either celebrating at the immediate acknowledgment of the win or of a player showing excitement for something that just happened. Posed photos of the winning teams were also quite abundant. Others photos showed defeat and loss.

**Softball**

The very first page of the ISF website, which is a welcome page, greets visitors with an embedded video montage of women’s softball on an international level. The video was made in 2006 and concludes with a clip of a player from the US team hitting a homerun. Then, on the homepage, seven of the ten photos used in the header/menu bar were of female players, all of which were ‘action’ shots of the players running, pitching, catching, or in a ready stance waiting for the next play. Each section of the website also had a different photo as part of its header. Five of the eight photos found within the various pages were of women, two were of men, and one was of an umpire, who’s gender could not be determined from the angle of the photo. The webpage linked to more softball videos via the ISF YouTube channel or on the backsoftball.com page. The videos created for the “Back Softball” campaign predominantly featured female
players. If men were featured in those videos, most often it was in the role of coach. Additional videos on the YouTube channel included a few interviews with male players but they were just talking heads. Therefore, men were less likely to be shown in visuals displaying athleticism than women.

**Indoor & Beach Volleyball**

In contrast, on the FIVB website, no specific gender dominated the visuals. Actually at the time that the site was downloaded, the majority of photos on the homepage were of the FIVB Board of Administration, which accompanied the many articles pertaining to their annual meeting and organization. Those group photos indicated that the board is comprised mostly of men. The FIVB website also included a pop-out video player with clips of matches from the 2008 and 2009 SWATCH World Tours (beach volleyball), the FIVB World League (men’s indoor), or the FIVB World Gran Prix (women’s indoor). The default videos that automatically began to play were of the beach volleyball tour that included men and women players.

On the second and third layers of the website, photos and videos of both genders were evident in relatively equal numbers. However, throughout the site an interesting distinction became apparent regarding beach and indoor volleyball. Although it was not by a large margin, women were showcased in more photos for beach volleyball than men, and more men were showcased in photos for indoor volleyball than women. For example, on the homepage, out of all the images of people playing volleyball, 6 of the 8 photos for indoor volleyball were of men and of the 4 photos for beach volleyball 2 were of men and 2 were of women. However, on the beach volleyball event page women were in 6 of the 10 photos. There were three types of photos both genders and versions of the game had in common: players with their trophies/medals, action shots of players jumping at the net or diving for the ball, and photos of teammates celebrating
with high-fives or other triumphant gestures. Although these numbers are not significant, the types of photos found for each gender revealed a greater distinction. This was particularly evident in the way beach volleyball photos framed women players. For instance in the news article “Port Elizabeth makes a splash for annual Beach Volleyball tournament” the accompanying photo is an oddly composed close-up shot of a women holding a volleyball against her right hip (see figure 4-1).

![Figure 4-1: Woman’s hip and volleyball](http://www.fivb.com/viewHeadlines.asp?No=23700&Language=en)

Some of the candid photos of women taken during actual play were also awkwardly framed causing the female body to become the prominent focus of the picture (See figure 4-2). Photos of the men players were not framed in the same way, even when the play appeared to be similar (see figure 4-3).

![Figure 4-2: Woman about to block shot](http://www.fivb.org/visasp/ShowImage.aspx?No=200659809&maxsize=500) ![Figure 4-3: Man about to block shot](http://www.fivb.org/visasp/ShowImage.aspx?No=200660437&maxsize=500)
**Ice Hockey**

On the IIHF homepage, not a single photo included a woman. However, there were photos of both men and women on the linked event pages. In both cases, the photos featured athletes playing ice hockey and receiving medals or trophies at the tournaments’ closing ceremonies. The only obvious difference was that there were simply more photos of men than women. Unlike the other sporting federations, the IIHF did not provide any videos of games or highlights on their website or Facebook page. The only video found on the website, located on the bottom right-hand side of the homepage, was about players’ safety and the dangers of taking hits to the head.

**Basketball & Soccer**

Like the FIVB website, the FIBA and FIFA site also provided game play highlights for men and women in the form of photos and videos; however, the photos accompanying their news stories were where a distinction could be found. For instance, in the article mentioned earlier about the female basketball player using her blog to call attention to the Haiti relief efforts, her picture is from a photo shoot, where her hair is down and she is posed with her hands and chin resting atop a basketball while she looks directly into the lens (see figure 4-4). Her femininity is reinforced through glamour. Appearing just two days earlier, a similar article about a male basketball player contributing to the relief efforts in Haiti was posted; however, the accompanying photo is of him playing ball (see figure 4-5). The other “Off the Court” articles, which were mostly about men, also utilized photos of individuals playing the sport and displaying their athleticism, which is considered a masculine trait.
FIFA used the same technique of spotlighting female athletes as individuals only when they appeared feminine. For instance, the photos accompanying the article “Eye-catching girls enhance allure” featured female athletes at a photo shoot, with make-up on and their hair down (see figure 4-6).

The FIBA page allows website members to upload their own photos and videos onto their FIBA profile pages, providing players the chance to represent for their team, country, or gender. Photos included individuals playing ball, fans with a professional athlete, team photos, and generic photos of fans at games or other basketball events. And on the FIFA video player, the 4th FIFA Women’s [Soccer] Symposium, which is largely about developing women’s soccer, is also available for viewing.
Sports and an international audience

The third research question asked to what extent do the web pages appeal to an international sporting community? Also, to what extent, if any, do the websites reflect a Eurocentric, an Americanized, or Western perspective of international sports? The first aspect of the websites examined to investigate this question was, what other languages are the websites offered in. Language can act as a barrier to internationalism -- after all, how useful or engaging can a website be if one cannot read it? Two of the five sites, FIVB and IIHF, were only available in English. The ISF site provided an additional language option in Spanish and the FIBA site provided a Chinese version (this is according to the Google Translate tool). The FIFA website offered five different language options aside from English: French, German, Spanish, Portuguese, and Arabic (also determined by the Google Translate tool).

Volleyball and ice hockey

Based on convenience and feasibility it is understandable that ice hockey is popular in countries located in the Northern Hemisphere and that beach volleyball is popular in places with beaches. Since hockey is played indoors, the sport can be played in any location that has the resources to create an ice rink. The many variations of volleyball allow people to play the game on a court or any flat surface with a net. Still it is important to consider geographic characteristics when investigating the global reach of each of these sports in addition to other factors such as history and politics.

The volleyball website emphasized teams representing Europe, North and South America, and Asia. Upcoming World Championships were to be held in Italy and Japan. Youth volleyball players would be competing in Singapore and the SWATCH World Tour was set to make stops in Brazil, China, Italy, Poland, Korea, Russia, the Czech Republic, Norway,
Switzerland, France, Austria, Finland, and Thailand. News articles boasted about Brazil, Venezuela, and Argentina’s unbeaten teams, provided results from the Asian Beach Volleyball Championship, discussed Iran, Puerto Rico, and Mexico’s victories, and Japan’s announcement of their preliminary men and women’s squads for the upcoming season.

Ice Hockey also had a strong presence primarily in North America and Europe. The next four tournaments were to be held in Belarus, the Netherlands, Slovenia, and Germany. Photos on the homepage included a Czech player celebrating after a goal, the U18 Sweden team in a huddle, and players from the AIK Stockholm team celebrating a victory. Additional featured news items were about the dominance of the Russian and Sweden teams in World U18 Championship (a tournament for players under the age of eighteen), a Swiss coach meeting his match, a legendary Soviet goalie becoming an ambassador of the 2010 IIHF World Championship, and the announcement that the US management team from the Olympics would work together again for the World Championships. Also worth noting is that, although many of the banner photos did not show gender or nationality, the one photo that did show a uniform is of a Canadian maple leaf.

**Softball**

The ISF website showcased an international field of athletes. For instance, the large photo headers found on the homepage and throughout the website showed players from Japan, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, Belgium, the Netherlands, Russia, Botswana, Venezuela, China, Italy, Australia, Korea, Israel, Singapore, Canada, South Africa, and the United States. Upcoming tournaments are being held in Venezuela and China, and a youth tournament is to take place in Florida. News articles from this year included information about a coaching seminar being held in the Dominican Republic, a new pitching program in Canada, a softball festival
taking place in Zimbabwe and the 5th World Cup of Softball taking place in Oklahoma City. Other articles discussed softball’s inclusion in the upcoming South American and Central American Games, a spotlight on Columbia’s softball programs, an American player who has overcome adversity, and a feature on Great Britain’s National Team. The ISF also orchestrated developmental programs around the world.

**Basketball**

As mentioned earlier, the date I downloaded the websites was shortly after the conclusion of the NCAA March Madness tournament, and therefore many of the articles, columns, and blogs revolved around the month long event. It is not possible to tell whether or not basketball in the United States usually occupies so much space and attention on the FIBA website but it is still worthwhile to investigate the website in the same manner as all the others. It is also relevant to note that one of the blogs pertaining to March Madness actually listed all the male international players who participated in the tournament: 27 from Europe, 6 from Latin America, 21 from North America & the Caribbean, 9 from Australia & Oceania, 22 from Africa, and 2 from Asia. Other featured news was from the United States, Lebanon, Argentina, Turkey, Nigeria, and Australia. Lastly, upcoming tournaments are to take place in Turkey, the Czech Republic, Germany, and France. To promote the upcoming 2010 Men’s World Championship Tournament FIBA created a campaign called the “Giant Get-Together”. Promotional materials included videos, photos, and downloadable wallpapers all featuring the same group of popular players who are set to play in the tournament. Players included in the promotional materials represented Turkey, France, Spain, Argentina, USA, Canada, Germany, Puerto Rico, Australia, Russia, and Brazil. Players from Turkey, the host nation, and Kobe Bryant were featured the most throughout
the materials. For example, out of the 19 photos, 5 featured Kobe Bryant and 5 were of three different players from Turkey.

**Soccer**

Compared to the other federation websites, the FIFA site is the most accessible and inclusive toward the global sporting community. Available in six different languages, soccer is more established in multiple regions than the other sports. Even within the comments and community section, it is evident that FIFA has a global presence. Although the FIFA website offers many more languages than the other federations examined here, it is interesting to note that they do not provide a Chinese option considering the large number of people in the world who speak it.

The FIFA homepage displayed the top three men’s teams, which are currently Spain, Brazil, and the Netherlands. It also has a “Member Association” spotlight, which was Saudi Arabia at the time of data collection. Upcoming tournaments are being hosted by South Africa, Germany, and Trinidad & Tobago. The latest photos that appeared on the homepage were from a handful of teams representing various regions and countries. Other online texts, such as “the Interview” and “Featured News” showcased stories and athletes from Argentina, Brazil, Germany, France, Uruguay, Korea, Egypt, England, and Spain. Although FIFA’s global presence may in fact be larger than the other federations, the website seemed to shine a greater spotlight on European and South American countries.

**A western influence**

All of the federations’ websites included a very westernized vibe. This was evident not only in the countries spotlighted but also reflected in the developmental work they engage in, which is addressed in greater detail in the framing section. Europe and North America occupied a
significant amount of space on the FIBA, FIFA, IIHF, and FIVB websites. Asian countries were also well represented on the ISF, FIBA, and FIVB websites. Additionally, the majority of the federations’ global partners or sponsors are based in Europe, the United States, or Japan. Out of the twenty spotlighted partners, the two exceptions were found on the FIFA website. They were Hyundai/Kia based in South Korea and the airline company Emirates based in Dubai.

The location of major clubs or leagues also seemed to influence the perspective of the websites. For instance, both the NBA and NHL are made up of American and International players. The FIBA and IIHF websites appeared to emphasize news and information pertaining to North America because both leagues are based in the United States and both sports originated in North America. Likewise, the FIFA website appeared to be heavily influenced by play based in Europe because of their popular club leagues and matches.

Principles of dialogical communication

The fourth research question investigated how the federations used online features to build and communicate to their various audiences. That is, to what extent do the sporting federations’ web pages employ the five principles of dialogical communication?

Dialogical loop

Each of the websites provided a “Contact Us” page, including names, mail and email addresses, and phone numbers for a variety of people associated with the federations. The ISF and FIBA websites also had a Frequently Asked Questions page. Each of the federations, with the exception of FIVB, also had message boards although it was unclear whether any representative of the federation read or responded to any of the postings. The ISF, FIBA, and the IIHF also had their own Facebook page providing members another method of contacting and
interacting with the federation. FIBA even utilizes Twitter to interact with fans. The FIFA website has an all-inclusive online community but it appears to be geared more towards fan-to-fan interaction.

**Usefulness of information**

Each of the sites offered areas and pages reserved for the multiple audiences they cater to, although judging from all five of the homepages, the websites are mostly intended for fans. Without having to navigate very far, features such as photos, videos, news, upcoming events, latest scores, member areas, and ticketing information could easily be found. Some federations like FIBA and FIFA offered detailed information about the locations of upcoming events and the IIHF included TV listings for ice hockey games when applicable.

The federations also included sections for other audiences such as the media and referees in addition to information about variations of each sport. All of the federations’ websites provided a section for press releases, although they were difficult to locate on the FIVB site. I could not find a direct link from the FIVB homepage to the press releases located within the “Infomedia” section. FIFA and the IIHF also offered specific sections for the media. These pages were locked down and required authorization to view its contents. According to FIFA this section includes, “specific content tailored to support journalists, photographers, and other media professionals” (“FIFA Media Channel”, para. 2). The ISF, FIVB, and FIBA also offered links to resources aimed towards umpires and referees. In addition, the FIBA site included an entire section entitled “Experts” with links for players, coaches, referees, medical personnel, and sports agents.
**Generation of return visitors**

With the exception of the ISF website, each of the other federation sites appeared to be updated frequently. The ISF website appeared stagnant, posting only 12 news stories from January 1, 2010 through April 14, 2010 to the website. With the exception of the ISF website, all of the other federations provided visitors with frequent updates and the ability to subscribe to its RSS Feed. FIBA members could use FIBA mobile or Twitter to connect with the federation and the IIHF is also on Facebook. Lastly, the FIFA site appeared to have a very active online community with fan-to-fan interaction, games, and other features that drew visitors in and keep them coming back to the website.

**Intuitiveness / Ease of interface**

The IIHF website was by far the cleanest and easiest to navigate. The website was sleek and visually pleasing with a color scheme reminiscent of an ice hockey rink. The ISF website was also easy to navigate but it appeared out-dated compared to the other websites. A dark green and black pinstriped background theme, found on the initial welcome page, is present throughout the site but all subsequent pages break up the striped monotony with a banner, menu bar, and series of scrolling photos that appeared across the top of each page. The banner was a photo of a row of softballs lined up on grass. Unlike most menu bars I have encountered, the ISF’s is positioned vertically on the right hand side. Taking up the majority of space at the top center is a revolving assortment of photos of men and women playing softball. In comparison to the photos and images at the top of the pages, everything else appears small. Event logos and photos are used for the featured news and upcoming events sections, but they are not clickable and any accompanying texts on the images were almost illegible due to the small size. Also, just about all the links throughout the entire website were small text. Very little is actually live on the site.
With the exception of the photos at the top of each page, the site’s overall appearance was static and uncluttered.

In comparison to the internationalsoftball.com website, the backsoftball.com page appeared much more up-to-date. A simple black border on the homepage helped the actual information stand out, even though it was mostly plain text. Regardless of the rather bare-bones appearance, the site actually looked clean and the homepage seemed to have all the essentials easily accessible. Obvious information about how to donate money, how else to help, and a link to the latest news could all be found on the same screen without having to scroll down. The menu bar across the top also allowed visitors to download PDFs of “Press Releases” and “Our Blueprint”, as well as a link to the “Multimedia Gallery”, which included embedded photos and videos that were used in the presentation to the IOC executive committee.

Overall, the FIVB website was frustrating to navigate. Many of the links from the news stories to the specified event resulted in error messages saying, “404 - File or directory not found. The resource you are looking for might have been removed, had its name changed, or is temporarily unavailable”. In actuality, these pages did exist and were easily navigated to from the main menu bar. This error message persisted even after several attempts on different days, at different times, and trying them while using a different Internet browser. Furthermore it seemed that once news stories were removed from the homepage and archived they were categorized rather than centrally located. The news link found on the main menu bar linked to a page called “Infomedia”, which separated the stories into sections for press releases, beach volleyball, volleyball, the game, programs, marketing, etc… I found this organizational structure to be slightly arbitrary. After all, essentially all of the news deals with volleyball in some aspect.
The official FIBA website has a consistent subtle white and grey background motif; however, the rest of the site, and especially the homepage were not lacking in visual stimulation. Various features and sections occupied a myriad of boxes on the homepage. Some rotated, others provided video or picture links, and the rest were orange or black text. The color scheme resembled the traditional coloring of a basketball. Below the menu bar was the largest section that rotated between four featured items. A variety of other links were easily found somewhere on the homepage, either in featured sections or within the sitemap located at the bottom. Additionally, the FIBA page offered a customize feature further providing efficient use of the website to community members.

The homepage of the official FIFA website is slightly overwhelming and chaotic. Despite the muted blue, silver, and white color scheme, the text, photos, and other images were everywhere, each fighting for attention. Featured news stories rotated, advertisements were animated, and the upcoming tournaments could be flipped through. The photo/video gallery was given a prominent position but there were also photos accompanying the news stories, and other FIFA features highlighted on the homepage. Also, on the top half of the page was a scrolling bar with the most recent scores, the latest men’s team rankings, and an embedded poll. The pages on the rest of the site were much less cluttered, making it easier to locate information after navigating away from the homepage.

**Rule of conservation of visitors**

None of the federation websites were particularly littered with links that navigate visitors away from their websites. All of them had sponsor/global partner links that could take visitors to an external site but they were all relatively small links, usually located at the very bottom of a page. FIBA, ISF, and IIHF utilized external social networking sites, which could be a catch
twenty-two. On one hand, these sites could provide a more personal reminder that new information is available, but on the other hand these sites could also enable individuals to get the news they want without ever visiting the official sites.

**Frames**

The fifth research question is, what frames emerge from interacting with sporting federation websites? Investigating the frames used by the sporting federations on their websites is essential to understanding how they work to promote their agendas by making salient what is, and conversely what is not important to their sport. Three main themes emerged from the websites. The first frame worked to promote sports in general, the second was concerned with the gendered nature of sports and the third frame employed showcased the western ideals embedded within Olympic sports.

**Sports are significant**

The primary frame employed by all of the sporting federations was that, sports are significant. This frame applied to almost all interactions occurring between the federations and their various audiences. While this may seem like an obvious observation, publicizing and promoting the significance of sports is essential to building and maintaining a global sporting community. If individuals did not find sports significant they would not play them, coach them, watch them, talk about them, write about them, or buy related merchandise. The federations convey this sense of significance primarily through website content and online features.

The sporting federations offered a plethora of information and images about their organizations, athletes (on and off the court, ice, field, etc.), games, leagues, industry, events, and more. These features combined to create an engaging experience encompassing and reinforcing
the many reasons why sports are significant on an international level. Most content pertained specifically to scores and standings, other content provided greater insight into the life of elite athletes. Some discussed the ways sports can provide health benefits and additional content worked to highlight the bond between sports and nationalism. A variety of opinions and viewpoints are also expressed on the sites by both members and sports columnists creating an ongoing dialogue between passionate individuals.

Stories on the site were also told in the most exciting terms possible. Athletics operate on extremes with amazing triumphs, devastating losses, underdogs, rivals, domination, blowouts, nail biters, and so on. The way sports were recounted play on emotions and always seemed to have ‘a lot riding’ on the outcome. Examples of some of the headlines used on the homepages included: “Player in softball, winner in life”, “Unilever overcome catastrophe to take Brazilian Superliga semifinal to tie-breaker”, “Long and winding road: AIK Stockholm back in Elitserien after eight-year exodus”, “Fab-ulous news for Argentina”, and “Forwards thrive as giants fall”. Visually, sports were conveyed as significant through exciting montages, by capturing the raw emotions of a victory or defeat, and by displaying the bond that existed between team members. Candid photos and videos showed athletes sliding, jumping, diving, and making contact with other players. The obvious goal is to get people invested in the sport, invested in the outcome, invested in the teams, and invested in the individual players.

In terms of features, the federations used a variety of techniques on their websites to uphold this frame. The majority of federations (with the exception of ISF) posted frequent updates, constantly creating a stream of information implying that sports are constant and that important need-to-know things are always occurring. Besides actual content, the websites also included features such as fan zones, the latest scores, rankings, countdowns, and other statistical
information. All of these encouraged fans to become further engaged in the sport. The utilization of websites like Facebook and Twitter help to advance the perception that sports are significant because it reinforces the notion that what the federations have to say and what they represent are important.

**Sports are gendered**

Female athletes were framed differently from male athletes on each of the federation websites. Also many of the frames used by the federations were similar to the frames utilized by the media that were identified in the literature review above.

**Men**

Male athletes and other men on the websites were framed to reinforce hegemonic masculinity. Men were not only the vast majority on each of the websites, with the exception of the ISF, but were also shown in positions of power or displaying their athletic prowess. Men not only occupied the position of athlete but also were coaches, committee members, and contributing writers.

With the exception of the ISF website, content and visuals heavily favored male athletes. Information for men was usually the default setting and easy to locate throughout the top three layers of each site. Some of the federations even provided greater details and additional features about the men’s game. For example, the FIBA and FIFA websites offered more statistics, greater attention to individual athletes, and additional features not available to women’s basketball or soccer. The sites included sections for soccer teams called “Focus On” and in basketball individual athletes were showcased in the “Key Player”, “Rising Star”, and “Legend” sections. Additionally, for the upcoming 2010 FIFA World Cup, FIFA website members could collect and trade virtual stickers of the top male players. No such features existed for women on any of the
websites. Also, unlike the female athletes on each of the websites, men were more regularly shown actively playing the sport. Photos accompanying news stories and other feature sections displayed men celebrating in victory but also mid play—hitting a volleyball, running around the bases, aggressively challenging another player for the ball, and jumping to slam dunk the basketball.

Besides playing a sport, men were also present on many of the websites as coaches, committee members, and contributing writers. Each of these roles involved some semblance of power, either over a team, within the federation, or in the opportunity to have their voice heard. Even on the ISF website, teams appeared to have predominantly male coaching staffs. News articles, features like interviews, and photos and videos from each of the websites provided evidence that the majority of coaches were in fact men. Men not only coached men but also coached women. To some extent, the role of men in a position of power and knowledge and the role of women as subordinates reinforced heteronormative and patriarchal ideals. Additionally, all five of the federations have male presidents and predominantly male committee members. Listings of members and photos of the various committees found under the sections about each of the federations confirmed this finding. Lastly, when it could be determined, men provided the majority of news articles and other written content to the websites. The IIHF and FIBA website were the only two sites to provide the names of contributing authors and columnists. Out of the 12 news stories posted on the IIHF home page, 5 were written by three different men, a singular female author wrote 2, and 5 had no author. On the FIBA website all columns and blogs were written by men. Not only are women athletes underrepresented but women are also denied a voice when it comes to the topic of sports.
Women

Because women were so infrequently found on three of the five federation websites, the way they were portrayed became even more significant as they were the only representatives of their gender in the male dominated space. Unfortunately, even with only a few articles or links from the FIFA, FIBA, and IIHF homepages, women were still framed in such a way to reinforce their femininity. Even though the FIVB website provided ample space to both genders, the website still relied on the hyper-sexualization of female athletes, made even easier by the sport’s small form fitting uniforms.

Femininity was reinforced on the FIFA and FIBA websites primarily through the content and photos of articles found in the news sections. As mentioned earlier, the only story to appear on the homepage of the FIFA website about female athletes was entitled “Eye-catching girls enhance allure”. Not only did the article describe the way various female soccer players like to be girly, but it was also accompanied by a set of black and white photos taken at a photo shoot of several female players for a calendar. In the photos some of the players are smiling at the camera, others have their hair down, while others are being goofy. Another set of photos accompanying the article is of women showing off their painted fingernails, a photo of a player in just her sports bra, and two photos of female cheerleaders from the 2008 Summer Olympics. Likewise, on the FIBA website, women athletes and females in general tended to be discussed outside of the sports context. In fact, all of the stories with links from the homepage about women were in the “Off the Court” section. The one story in that section about a beach basketball tournament in Brazil was mentioned earlier; however, even though a female player was quoted in the article, the accompanying photo was of two men playing. Another article discussed how French basketball star Tony Parker planned a romantic birthday surprise for his
wife Eva Longoria, an American actress. The only other article, actually about a female basketball player was also discussed earlier. Entitled “Sutton-Brown salutes those who help Haiti”, the article talked about how this female player called attention to the relief efforts in Haiti and was accompanied by a posed photo of her resting her chin and hands on a basketball while she smiled at the camera.

The FIVB website on the other hand utilized its sport’s revealing uniforms to reinforce gender differences and hyper-sexualize the female athlete. Women volleyball players who played on an indoor court wore form fitting short shorts and tight sleeveless tops. The men wore slightly looser shorts and shirts with short sleeves. On the beach, men wore tank tops and shorts while the women wore bikini style uniforms. Unlike the other sports, where male and female athletes wore very similar uniforms, volleyball distinctly distinguishes each gender. As discussed earlier in the section pertaining to images and videos, there were more images of women playing beach volleyball on the first two levels of the website than men and more photos of men playing indoor volleyball than women. Regardless of the angle the photos were taken in, women were constantly showing more skin than men due to their apparel or lack there of. It is interesting that with the exception of softball, women received the most amount of exposure in the sport they wear the least amount of clothing.

**Sports provide apolitical diplomacy**

One of the more interesting findings to emerge from coding the websites was the extensive amount of developmental work each of the federations do, to not only encourage growth in the sport but also to contribute to the improvement of society. Interestingly, each of the federations approached the area of development in a similar fashion but none of them placed the work they did in the broader social, political, and cultural contexts in which they operate.
For instance, within the FIFA website, under the “About FIFA” section, there are separate tabs for social, political, and cultural elements of FIFA. It is fascinating to me that they can even be so easily broken into sections when in reality each of those elements are complicatedly intertwined. Nonetheless, FIFA places its developmental activities under the social tab. Out of all the federations FIFA offered the most programs. Its main program appeared to be the “Football for Hope” program. According to the website, “[Soccer] has a positive effect on those who play it, both in terms of health (physical activity) and life skills (the value of team sport). But beyond that the game serves as an effective tool in community programs for social development” (“Football for Hope”). The focus was more specifically on health promotion, peace building, children’s rights & education, anti-discrimination & social integration, and the environment. Other programs FIFA coordinated included the Financial Assistance Program (FAP), sponsor awareness-raising campaigns, and emergency aid and disaster relief. Its current development program, coinciding with the 2010 World Cup, is called “Win in Africa with Africa” and is “…Not about sending aid to Africa so much as providing the continent with the tools to progress and the skills with which it can continue on its own development” (“Win in Africa with Africa”). FIFA’s mission is to, “develop the game, touch the world, and build a better future” (“FIFA Brand - Our commitment”).

The developmental programs offered through FIBA, the ISF, and FIVB were similar in that they provided clinics to coaches, players, and referees and worked to support nations by donating equipment. FIBA’s “Basketball without Borders” camps began in 2001 and have targeted youth in Europe, Africa, America, and Asia. The federation hopes to “…Use the sport of
basketball as a common language for global peace, friendship, and sportsmanship” (“Basketball Without Borders (BWB) camps”). According to the ISF website, specific information about what they do is coming soon but it does provide a link to “ Countries we have helped”, which included 15 in Africa, 25 in the Americas, 10 in Asia, 32 in Europe, and 9 in the Oceania regions. Similarly, the Volleyball Cooperation Program (VCP) has been in existence for over 20 years and according to the website, “The support offered by the FIVB allows the organization of courses in countries that would never have the means to improve their skills without assistance, making opportunities arise for countries to develop their potential” (“FIVB Volleyball Cooperation Programme (VCP)”).

**IIHF**

Lastly, the IIHF developmental programs were more centered on supplying equipment to countries that demonstrated need. The Equipment Supplier program worked on a National Association level and was only awarded to those with dedication and plans to improve. Counties that qualified for the supplies included: Australia, the UK, Hong Kong, Macau, Malaysia, New Zealand, Romania, Spain, and Turkey. Additionally, the IIHF holds an annual Hockey Development Camp. The camp is for youth players. In 2009 it was limited to boys; however, the 2010 camp is for girls only and has the goal of developing women’s ice hockey. So far girls from 46 countries are set to attend.

**Impression Management**

The final research question asks, which impression management strategies are most likely to be used by the sporting federations? The strategy of competence and ingratiation were used most often. This is not surprising since these federations would want to be perceived as being
qualified to govern a sport and likeable to its many audiences. Exemplification was also identified on each of the federation websites. Softball made some use of supplication; however, none of the federations employed the strategy of intimidation.

**Competence**

All federations displayed and utilized the strategy of competence. This is no surprise; after all, they are all a ‘world governing body’ of one of these sports. For example, according to the FIVB website, the federation “is now the largest sports organization in the world in terms of its 220 member National Federations, operating at continental level through five confederations based in Africa, Asia, Europe, North & Central America and South America” (“The new era”). FIBA is also quick to point out its accomplishments, “Compared to the other international big governing bodies, we are still a young sports federation. However, our game has conquered the world in breathtaking speed. Just keep in mind that we became an Olympic Sport only four years after our creation” (“75 Years of global basketball celebration”). Additionally, each federation is charged with orchestrating the various world tournaments and competitions, enforcing rules and regulations, approving officials and venues, and facilitating the growth and development of each sport. In addition to overseeing the specific sports mentioned, each federation also oversees many of the sports variations such as slow-pitch softball, beach volleyball, in-line hockey, beach basketball, and futsal (a game similar to indoor soccer) to name a few. The federations also display their competence by exhaustively covering all aspects of the sport through the various online features, sections, and content.

**Ingratiation**

In their attempts to be likable, each of the federations also utilized the strategy of ingratiation. Similar to the strategy of competence, the federations utilized online features and
specific content to appease its many constituents. As the primary online audience, fans were especially targeted through the strategy of ingratiation. Each of the federations provided a variety of tools and features to improve the online experience. For example, each website included multimedia content enabling fans to view photos or watch videos of game highlights, interviews with elite players, or learn tips and tricks of the game. The ISF and IIHF also belong to the social networking site Facebook and FIBA has a Twitter account, all of which allow fans to receive content and updates without having to check the official site. Lastly, FIBA and FIFA provided website members with the ability to personalize the sites to their preferences thus ensuring a greater degree of likability by enhancing the website experience.

Additionally, the federations also provided the type of content they assumed their visitors would want to find. For example, because fans were the primary audience of the websites, the latest scores and event information were readily available on each site. Furthermore, ticketing information, schedules, and fan zones were easily located. The IIHF also provided TV listings, the FIBA website provided blogs offering varying viewpoints on the game, and the FIFA, FIBA, ISF, and FIVB websites each included an online store. To satisfy additional groups such as referees, players, and the media, the federations also provided links pertaining to their specific wants and needs. Each sporting federation also utilized its website to describe the benefits of sport and about the developmental work they take part in. Content found on the websites explained how each sport federation worked to promote a healthy lifestyle, teach life skills, and give back to various communities in need.

Exemplification

Another strategy found within certain sections of the websites was exemplification. As a reminder, this strategy is employed to be perceived as being morally superior through long-term
dedication to a cause. Pages related to the developmental work of each federation make use of this strategy because the federations seek to appear essential to society and to look as if the work they do is not entangled in politics. As FIFA explains, “The world is a place rich in natural beauty and cultural diversity, but also one where many are still deprived of their basic rights. FIFA now has an even greater responsibility to reach out and touch the world, using football as a symbol of hope and integration” (“FIFA brand – Our commitment”). FIBA also orchestrates several developmental programs, one of which is to prevent doping. FIBA explains that they have been testing athletes since 1989 and that the newest campaign "No Doping Days" “…is a further step in FIBA's educational effort in the fight against doping, especially focused on sending youngsters of the game a positive message” (“FIBA clean game campaign”).

**Supplication & Intimidation**

While I was unable to find any examples of intimidation, a case can be made for the ISF’s use of the supplication strategy. On its backsoftball.com website they have a button to “Make a Donation.” The page explains, “The funds raised will go to the Back Softball Campaign. Click here to learn how…your contribution [will] help.” Although the majority of the federations have a store or a site to purchase merchandise, the ISF is the only federation asking for visitors to support a campaign (“Back Softball) by visiting their online store. The ISF online store sells apparel, key chains, patches, pins, and visors with the ISF and “Back Softball” logos on them.
Chapter 5

Discussion

To reiterate, the purpose of this thesis was to compare the International Softball Federation with other team sport federations to understand and observe any differences. Of interest was how each federation portrayed male and female athletes, appealed to an international audience, and how they utilized online tools and public relations strategies to advance their agendas and communicate with their various audiences. Based on the review of literature and the findings, the overall goal of this thesis is to provide suggestions to the ISF to enhance their “Back Softball” efforts.

The representation of women

Like the other studies discussed above, the federations’ websites similarly underrepresented women athletes and/or treated them differently. Evidence of this treatment is obvious in the lack of women as is the case with FIBA, IIHF, and FIFA and the hyper-sexualization / reinforced femininity of women on the FIVB, FIBA, and FIFA websites through the copious amounts of photos of scantily-clad women playing beach volleyball and the photos of women posed rather than in action. Women were also commonly referred to as national representatives or international teams rather than individuals. This is not surprising given that our society is more comfortable with women athletes when they represent us in international sporting events (Jinxia, 2003; Wensing & Bruce, 2003). The separation and noticeable differences in the treatment of women on these sites create a hierarchy of importance, with women athletes being situated below male athletes, with two notable exceptions: softball and beach volleyball.
One critical difference between federation websites and the other media formats that has previously been studied is that the federation websites are not profit-driven. The media and corporate sponsors commonly explain the lack of equality as a result of limited financial resources and the general lack of demand for women’s sports information (Baroffio-Bota & Banet-Weiser, 2006; Bellamy, 2006; Shaw & Amis, 2001; Sullivan, 2006). The federations, on the other hand, are charged with growing and developing their sport. They presumably have complete control over the way their sport is represented on their own websites. So the question remains, why are women not treated equally within the sports federations’ online environment? Equitable coverage for women would cost the federations nothing. And yet the treatment of women within their own sports “home” is as dismissive as in the well-documented areas of sports coverage and sponsorships.

Many of the federations’ developmental programs include ways to increase female participation in sports, for example by offering clinics and donating equipment. Yet the content on the websites contradicts their efforts: women receive recognition infrequently for their athletic feats. This indicates that the frames found in traditional sports journalism are not being actively combated at one important source, the sporting federations. As earlier literature discussed, frames can perpetuate and naturalize dominant ideals usually at the expense of a minority group, women in this instance (Akhavan-Majid & Ramaprasad, 2000; D’Angelo, 2002; Carragee and Roefs; 2004). The frames used by the sporting federations on their websites work to promote their agenda by making salient what is, and conversely what is not important to their sport. The general omission of women depicts and perpetuates the perception that only men occupy the world of sports. This is of course untrue, both men and women play and compete on an international level for each of the sports examined here, but through the websites the federations
are setting the agenda that within the world of sports men are the priority. Curiously, the sporting federations, which are the world governing bodies for each sport, are actually in positions of power to potentially influence perceptions of women in sports. They should assume some level of responsibility for the treatment and promotion of female athletics.

**A global presence**

Findings regarding the international nature of these websites demonstrated that the federations are in fact influenced by their western origins and the western ideals perpetuated by the Olympic Movement. All of the websites provided a substantial amount of attention to competitions and athletes from North American and Europe. Additionally, the western nature of these federations was evident in their developmental work, which most often was aimed towards non-western or developing nations in Africa or the Middle East. The frames found on the websites promoted apolitical diplomacy by purposefully disassociating the federations’ efforts from any specific nation and other politically intertwined elements. Rationale provided for their outreach was that sport was a non-political arena that could be used to better society because it can teach teamwork, promote a healthy lifestyle, and empower individuals. Obviously these federations do not exist in a vacuum and are influenced by political, cultural, and social climates. The very example of softball’s elimination from the Olympics provides an illustration of the political undertones that encompass all international sports.

The primary rationalization made by the IOC president, Jacques Rogge, for eliminating the sport of softball was that the game did not have a large enough international presence. Another corresponding argument made against the sport was that the constant domination by the United States created lopsided competition further highlighting the sport’s slow growth in other areas of the world. However, as discussed earlier softball is played in 128 countries and the ISF
has more national federation members than some of the other current Olympic sporting federations (Munro, 2008). Additionally, throughout the history of the Olympics, there are a number of other examples of a sport being dominated by one country in its early years of Olympic inclusion, as was the case with basketball and men’s ice hockey (International Olympic Committee, 2009).

The victory of the Japanese team at the last Olympic Games should have dispelled some of these qualms, but ultimately it appears that softball’s issues are not so much its lack of growth but lack of growth in specific regions. Softball has had the greatest success in the Americas, Asia, and Oceania but still remains largely unpopular in Europe. For example, the upcoming international tournaments and competitions are scheduled to take place in Venezuela, Asia, and the United States. For the ISF XII Women’s World Championship only 3 out of 16 teams competing are from Europe. Additionally, softball will be played at the 16th Asian Games and the ISF Youth Tournament is to take place in the United States. However, as discussed earlier, not only does Europe have the largest block of IOC votes but they also will be hosting the next Olympic Games in London in 2012 (Munro, 2008). While the developmental work that the ISF has initiated in places like the Middle East and Africa is commendable it is perhaps not particularly helpful when it comes to playing political hardball.

**Public relation strategies**

The public relation strategies examined here included the principles of dialogical communication and impression management strategies. Framing was also examined; however, the frames identified within each of the websites were discussed in the above sections pertaining to gender and internationalism.
Principles of dialogical communication

The ISF website stood out from the rest of the federation sites when investigating the use of the principles of dialogical communication. Out of all five of the federation websites, the ISF site was the most outdated in appearance and static in terms of updates and live links. Also unlike the other websites, the ISF provided more links taking visitors to external sites, such as YouTube that could potentially stray visitors away from the website prematurely. According to Kent and Taylor (1998) this may be detrimental because the Rule of Conservation of Visitors is aimed at preventing people from being led away from the website, possibly to never return. The ISF website was also lacking in terms of the Generation of Return Visitors. Unlike the other sites, the ISF less frequently posted updates and the online community of members showed very little activity in comparison to FIBA or FIFA. Overall these findings indicate that the ISF website is lacking in some areas of its online presence and could benefit from revamping their website.

Impression management strategies

Competence and exemplification were the most used impression management strategies discovered on the federation websites. Based on the findings by Connolly-Ahern and Broadway (2007) this was anticipated. As world governing bodies, the strategy of competence was utilized to reinforce their expertise in the sporting world. Exemplification was used to give the impression of being morally superior and trustworthy through the coordination of developmental programs.

In order to appear likeable, each of the federation websites also utilized the strategy of ingratiating. The federations accomplished this by giving audiences what they wanted through online content and features. One possible explanation for why women were not featured on the
websites is that the federations assumed visitors would not want information about women’s sports. What other reason could there be for not featuring female athletes on the federation websites? As discussed in the literature review, our society is uncomfortable with female athletes when they display ‘masculine’ characteristics such as power and aggression, which are generally traits required in team sports. Rather than work towards change and gender equality, it appears that the federations are content to perpetuate the dominant ideals of sport in order to appease their various audiences and global sponsors.

The ISF was the only federation to utilize the strategy of supplication. This was not surprising since the ISF is in a different position than the other federations, no longer a part of the Olympics. However, the strategy was only made salient on their “Back Softball” page, which was difficult to locate from the ISF homepage. I found this strange because it seems like it would still be relevant to promote the initiative since softball failed to achieve inclusion in the 2016 Summer Olympics. Also, any uses of impression management strategies on pages unseen are going to be ineffective. None of the federations used the strategy of intimidation.

Implications

Bearing the responsibility for pursuing equality

As the primary authority, the IOC has a large network of countries, sporting federations, and media institutions at its disposal. Additionally, the mission and roles of the IOC include, very specifically, “To encourage and support the promotion of women in sport at all levels and in all structures with a view to implementing the principle of equality of men and women” (International Olympic Committee, 2009). And as discussed previously, in the above section and the literature review, the IOC and the Olympic Movement originated in Europe and the continent
still is the majority in terms of members on the committee and home grown sports included in the games. Although the United States and other Westernized nations have also become prominent figures in the Olympic Movement, the United States seems to be most often singled out for having success in sports originating on their soil. Conceivably softball, and to some degree the sport of women’s ice hockey, are suffering from Title IX backlash.

While it is likely that the dominance of the US in softball can be attributed to the subsequent success of the passage of the Title IX of the Educational Amendments of 1972 in the United States, the exclusion of softball could also be related. In the thirty-eight years since its passage, girls and young women have increasingly participated in high school and college athletics. And as Brown and Connolly (2010) point out,

Colleges and universities often serve as the main training ground for aspiring elite and professional athletes and simultaneously function as showcase venues for select invitations to train as potential Olympic athletes […] in college and university athletic programs alone, American female athletes trained in approximately 54 percent of the Olympic sports currently available to women (p. 6). Perhaps, instead of feeling threatened by the supposed ‘American dominance’, the IOC should use the accomplishments of Title IX as an example for other initiatives to enable greater female participation in sports around the world.

Although the IOC could potentially do more to promote women’s sports and increase female participation, within the boundaries of this thesis, the responsibility falls to the sports federations. Each sporting federation claims it is interested in expanding the women’s game, but in the one space they have complete control over, women were unfairly treated. On the websites female athletes were underrepresented, hyper-sexualized, or reinforced as feminine first and athletic second. These websites are unmediated and therefore there is no reason why women should not be provided with equal space and comparable content. These sports federations have
the ability to influence the perceptions of women and sports by encouraging change; however, the websites instead perpetuate dominant ideals and popular frames that reinforce hegemonic masculinity. As international organizations with a global audience the ISF, FIVB, IIHF, FIBA, and FIFA should each be held accountable for way they represent and promote male and female athletes.

**Recommendations for the Back Softball initiative**

To date, the “Back Softball” campaign has been unsuccessful in that its primary goal to get softball back in the Olympics has not yet been achieved. A closer examination of the initiative’s blueprint reveals that many of its goals overlap with the overall mission of the federation. Perhaps a more targeted approach would enable the ISF to specifically address the issues that led to softball’s Olympic exclusion.

From this research, the most obvious recommendation for the ISF and its “Back Softball” initiative is to update and or revamp their website. To begin with, the “Back Softball” initiative should be given a prominent link on the ISF website. Sometimes what is not found on the website is equally significant to what is, and in this instance I had difficulty locating a link for backsoftball.com, and I knew the website existed. Additionally, in comparison to the other sporting federations’ websites, the ISF website appeared outdated, amateurish, and static. Videos could easily be embedded right on their website and a newer video, perhaps of the Japanese team winning the gold medal game at the 2008 Olympics, could be used on the welcome page. More features and athlete spotlights may also help the website and the game.

Continuing on the topic of spotlighting athletes, the game of softball and the initiatives of its backers may also benefit from creating ambassadors or role models out of top athletes. Other sports, especially men’s sports, have household names that everyone knows and can associate the
game with or look up to. For instance, in the realm of women’s sports, soccer has Mia Hamm and volleyball has Misty May-Treanor, whereas the most popular softball player, at least in the United States is probably Jenny Finch, but her notability seems limited to the softball community. The only way to cultivate well-known figures is to increase their presence, using the federations’ websites is one cost effective way of doing so.

Another suggestion for the ISF’s Back Softball initiative is to work on developing the game in Europe. Part of the initiative’s goals are to expand the reach of the game, but it also clearly seems to matter where the game is played when it comes to gathering IOC support. Politics do play a role in the Olympic movement and as Chappelet and Kuber-Mabbott (2008) explained, not all federations have equal power. Ideally, the ISF should promote the game at all levels for youth, men, and women. It would make sense that if more people enjoy playing the game, they may also enjoy seeing it in the Olympics. The ISF could utilize their website to demonstrate, through videos, the different variations of the game and perhaps offer other video tips and coaching pointers for interested players. Additional fan features on the website may also increase the community activity and could potentially help players from around the world better their game by sharing stories and playing strategies. Like the FIBA website, which allows site members to post their own photos or videos, maybe the ISF could employ a similar feature so players can share their batting and pitching techniques. Following the principles of dialogical communication, the ISF website needs to find ways to entice visitors to repeatedly come back to its website.

In addition to expanding the sport into new areas, the ISF may also want to concentrate on further promoting the sport to all individuals, regardless of gender or age. Because a predominantly female team sport challenges gender norms, softball may be more easily accepted
if men are more commonly associated with it. Also, although baseball is a global sport, I agree with the ISF’s decision to not align with IBAF. If anything, the ISF could probably benefit from their lack of connection to baseball. Softball can offer its top athletes and a drug-free sport to the Olympic Movement, baseball cannot. Also since baseball is no longer part of the Olympics either, the ISF’s inclusion of men’s softball on their Olympic quest may make their bid more enticing. Also, to be fair, if the other federations are responsible for promoting gender equality the ISF is equally responsible for promoting female and male softball players.

Limitations

As with most qualitative studies, the primary limitations of this thesis are the potential issues revolving around subjectivity and reliability (McDowell, 2004). However, as Kracauer (1952) explains, “Far from being an obstacle, subjectivity is in effect indispensable for the analysis of materials which vanish before our eyes when subjected to a treatment confounding them with dead matter” (p. 642). I do not attempt to make over-sweeping generalizations but instead am offering just one possible reading of these texts, albeit a critical one. Additionally, the sample of sporting federations is small and is only truly representative of the timeframe available on the first three levels. A longitudinal study may have produced another set of findings. However, the coding of hyperlinks did allow for a limited window of time to be captured and the findings are similar to many of the existing studies concerned with the quality and quantity of women’s sports coverage.

Future Research

More research is needed into the way various organizations handle and treat women in sports. Once the mediated layer is removed from the equation, how do other sporting federations
position men and women? Most of the federations included in this thesis offer world events for both men and women. While the tournaments or competitions do not usually occur at the same time, it may be fruitful to examine the ways the federations handle each event. Considering the IIHF, FIBA, and FIFA had hardly any articles or features pertaining to women when the sample was collected it may be relevant to examine how women are treated when they do appear.

In non-team sports or within sports that have been traditionally labeled as safely feminine such as gymnastics and figure skating, are there similar or different frames found within those federations? Even if women are more visible in those sports, is there equality in terms of quality of coverage? Just showing more women does not necessarily result in better coverage. Does the increase in women rely on the increase of bare skin? Female athletes deserve to be taken seriously for their hard work and dedication and more focus should be on their athletic performance rather than their appearances.

Another avenue for future research is to examine how women position themselves. Official websites, press releases, and other materials generated by leagues like the WNBA (Women’s National Basketball Association) and the WPS (Women’s Professional Soccer) could provide interesting texts for examination. Like the sporting federations they are interested in promoting women in sports but these leagues are financially dependent. Prior to the influence of the media, in what ways do these types of leagues portray female athletics. Do they utilize similar frames as men’s leagues, do they perpetuate frames for women found in the media, or have they attempted to frame women in a completely different and distinct way?

Lastly a closer examination of laws pertaining to gender and sports such as the United States’ Title IX is needed. Obviously participation within the United States for girls and women has increased since its inception, but what kind of impact has that had outside of the United
States? In what ways are other countries pushing, or not pushing, for equality in access and participation in sports? Is there any connection between Olympic performances and the use of or lack of anti-discrimination laws existing in the various participating countries? If certain countries are dominating a sport, perhaps a closer investigation should be conducted to determine the ways other countries may replicate their success rather than write the sport off.

**Conclusion**

The treatment of softball and the other female team sports observed here reveals the larger societal problem at hand. The findings demonstrated that female athletes not only need increased exposure, but also better representation; equal to that of male athletes. Most significantly, this thesis revealed that the gender inequality in sports exists outside of the media landscape. In fact, the sports federations are just as responsible for excluding women and reinforcing dominant frames. However, unlike the media, these federations are not profit-driven and should be held responsible for accepting and including women in the sporting world.

Ultimately, it would be a wonderful triumph for a predominantly female sport to be reinstated in the Olympics, but its future is uncertain. In Rogge’s efforts to prevent the Olympics from becoming too large, a current sport would have to be eliminated before softball could be reconsidered (Chappelet & Kuber-Mabbott, 2008). Also, given the recent unsuccessful efforts made by women’s ski jumping to be included, it would seem that softball faces an uphill battle. The fight however is worth it, and I think necessary to the mission of providing gender equality in sports. The values of the sport of softball align with the values of the Olympic movement; the challenge now is demonstrating this to the International Olympic Committee.
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