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TRINITY COLLEGE

SENIOR THESIS

**The Female Athlete Through an Olympic Lens: Media Coverage of Women's Ice Hockey
and Its Impact on Gender Equality**

Submitted By

Chandler Solimine

May 10th, 2019

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for

Honors in American Studies 2018

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thank you...

To Professor Gac... for believing that I had the potential to write a thesis (despite my own doubts) and supporting me every step of the way. Your advice and guidance through my research encouraged me to think outside the box and push my curiosity to its limits. With music and sports being my two greatest passions, I consider myself extremely lucky to have an advisor who is not only a renown cellist, but who has completed more marathons and Ironman Triathlons than I can count. I will be forever grateful for your help and inspired by all you have accomplished.

To the American Studies Department... for helping me find interest and passion in the classroom over the past four years. Words cannot express how much I appreciate the lessons I have learned, insights I have gained, and help I've received from Professor Jack Giesecking, Professor Alex Manevitz, Professor Cheryl Greenberg, Professor Karen Hanna, and Jeff Liszka. You all consist of some of the most intelligent people I have ever met, and I thank each of you for sharing your knowledge with me. Your dedication to your students and your studies is what makes Trinity such a beautiful place.

To my parents... for giving me the opportunity to pursue my education at Trinity. And of course, for spending countless hours driving me all over New England to my hockey games growing up, and for always being my #1 fans.

To the sport of ice hockey... for kicking me in the ass for 15 years and ingraining in me the values of hard work, self-discipline, and determination. I would not be who I am today if it weren't for this sport, and I will be forever grateful that I found this passion many years ago.

To my friends of TCFH, Trinidudes, and Crescent 108... for your words of encouragement and constantly asking me "Shouldn't you be working on your thesis right now?" whenever I started to slack off. #ThesisSzn has commenced.

Introduction: Women's Ice Hockey in Context

Ice hockey has been an integral part of my life for as long as I can remember. I grew up in a time when it was becoming normalized for girls to be playing this sport. Over the past 20 years, I have witnessed more and more of my peers pick up the sport after realizing its unique and thrilling qualities, and I was always proud to identify myself with such a “cool” game. While I can confidently say that my experience growing up playing ice hockey has made me who I am and I wouldn't change a second of it, I am also the first to say that it is no walk in the park playing a male dominated sport as a young girl. The following is a short excerpt from a memoir I wrote about my experience as an ice hockey player, and I believe this moment epitomizes the unique, and sometimes difficult, experience of growing up as a female hockey player in America over the past two decades:

Flashback to one of my peewee hockey games being played in an outdoor rink on a random week night in the middle of a frigid January. “Anyone notice who they're beating up on out there? C'mon, anyone?” Mr. Reilly, my coach at the time, asked as a room full of ignorant, prepubescent boys, who stared blankly back at him, obviously not having any clue as to what he was talking about. I knew exactly what he was referring to though, and it made me start to sweat. The boys threw out some names as Mr. Reilly just shook his head as a disapproving “nope.” He finally pointed a finger at me and said “It's Chandler, they're killing her out there,” as I returned a half smile to him as a way of saying thanks, and tried to pretend like I didn't feel every little sweaty head in the room turn my way. I used every ounce of fiber in me not to let a tear droplet roll onto my cheek, and I felt the ball of fire in my stomach that had been there since my first shift of the game begin to grow. ‘How could none of these idiots notice,’ I thought angrily. I was the only girl on

the ice, and probably the only girl in the rink for that matter, besides a couple moms, and the other team must've come to the consensus that they would spend the entire previous period of our game charging after me, looking to lay a nice check that they could brag about once they got back to their bench. One shift after another I was getting slammed into the boards or dropped to my knees as if I had a target on my back. Well, I guess you could say I did have a kind of target on my back, if you count my long, blonde ponytail.

Over the past half a century, the image of the female athlete has completely transformed. It is impossible to discuss the history of women's sports in America without referencing Title IX, and how this has affected the opportunities for girls and women to engage in and excel through sport. The 1972 law states that "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 educational program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance."¹ This forced any federally funded institution, including schools, to provide girls and boys equal access to sports opportunities. According to the Women's Sports Foundation, prior to the passage of Title IX, one in 27 girls played sports. By 2017, this statistic had risen to two in every five. The growth of opportunity increased the number of girls playing collegiate sports by 545%, and the number of girls playing high school sports by 990%.² It is Title IX that has also allowed American women to dominate in the Olympic Games in numerous sports over the past three decades.

¹ Olmstead, Maegan. "Title IX and the Rise of Female Athletes in America." Women's Sports Foundation. October 19, 2016. Accessed April 2019.

<https://www.womenssportsfoundation.org/education/title-ix-and-the-rise-of-female-athletes-in-america/>.

² Ibid.

Why has it been so important that women have equal access to play sports? Participation in sport not only provides girls the ability to have fun and be active, but also creates benefits that extend far beyond what happens on the field, court, or ice. It has been proven that sports have the power to affect character development of young girls, and ingrain important qualities such as confidence, determination, competitiveness, ability to work with a team, and leadership that can lead to better educational achievement and success in the workforce. A 2010 study aiming to show the effects of Title IX revealed that a 10% increase in state-level female participation in sports correlates to a 1-2% increase in female labor force participation. Sports have not only generated more women to work over recent decades, but they have also allowed these women to earn greater wages. Research shows that annual wages of former athletes, all other factors held constant, are on average about 7% higher than those of non-athletes.³ 94% of female CEOs played sports at some point in their lives, and 50% of them played at the college level.⁴ It has been proven that the relationship between participation in sports and educational and professional success applies even stronger to girls and women than to boys and men.

Prior to Title IX, there was more opportunity for women, particularly those from higher socioeconomic classes, to play individual sports than there was to participate in team sports. Historically, women from upper class families who had access to proper training, equipment, and space to play participated in sports such as tennis and golf. However, after Title IX prompted schools across the country to create more programs for girls to join, there became a great shift

³ Kotschwar, Barbara. "Women, Sports, and Development: Does It Pay to Let Girls Play?" *Peterson Institute for International Economics*, March 2014. <https://piie.com/publications/pb/pb14-8.pdf>.

⁴ Brooke-Marciniak, Beth A., and Donna De Varona. "Amazing Things Happen When You Give Female Athletes the Same Funding as Men." *World Economic Forum*. August 2016. Accessed April 2019. <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2016/08/sustaining-the-olympic-legacy-women-sports-and-public-policy/>.

towards greater female participation in team sports. Playing an individual sport and playing a team sport are two very different experiences. While one can argue that there are pros and cons to both, there are components of being on a team and working with a group of people towards one goal that can translate into many other factions of life. While boys had been practicing their ability to work with others and be codependent for years through organized team sports, girls were just beginning to experience this whole new side of the benefits of sports. Basketball and softball began picking up speed among high school girls almost immediately following the passing of the law, with soccer, lacrosse, and field hockey following close behind.⁵

Limitations of Sports

However, all of this is not to say that all women across the globe or throughout America have the same access to sports and the opportunities they can provide. The growth of girls playing sports and receiving health and social benefits from it has proportionally affected the white, upper class female population more so than any other demographic. The gender gap in youth athletic participation greatly depends on factors such as race, background, family income, and location. The Women's Sports Foundation conducted a study of third through 12th grade girls in America and found that while 75% of white girls play sports, less than two thirds of African American girls and about half of Asian girls play sports. There are also far fewer immigrant females playing sports, while male immigrants are well immersed in athletic programs. Don Sabo, a professor of health policy at D'Youville College in Buffalo and the report's lead researcher, concluded that these numbers could reflect cultural attitudes that

⁵ Demaria, Chris. "What Are the Most Popular Youth Sports?" Livestrong. Accessed April 2019. <https://www.livestrong.com/article/99949-popular-youth-sports/>.

discourage some daughters from participating in athletics. The disparity was even greater among girls of low-income families, particularly those who attend school in urban areas.⁶ These trends are prevalent in college athletics as well. African American women are underrepresented in every collegiate sport other than Division 1 basketball and track and field, and Hispanic women make up less than 4% of NCAA athletes.⁷

Participation in sports can require a large investment in both time and money, especially when it comes to playing on teams or in leagues outside of school that require additional costs for space to play, uniforms, try-out fees, etc. While girls from wealthy suburban areas have greater access to opportunities that allow for room to excel in sports outside of school-funded programs and take their athletic careers further, most girls outside of this bubble do not have access to these options and tend to drop their sports earlier on.⁸ There are also several reasons that specific sports prevail over others amongst women from lower income families. Sports like basketball, soccer, track and field, or softball are more easily accessible in terms of equipment and spaces to play, compared to more expensive and inaccessible sports like lacrosse, golf, or ice hockey. While all someone needs to practice basketball is a ball and a court with a net, which can be found at most public parks, to consistently practice golf one would need a set of clubs, proper attire, and access to a course.

⁶ Sabo, D., and P. Veliz. "Go Out and Play: Youth Sports in America." *Women's Sports Foundation*, 2008. Accessed April 2019.

⁷ Dusenbery, Maya. "Charts: The State of Women's Athletics, 40 Years After Title IX." *Mother Jones*. June 25, 2017. Accessed April 2019.

<https://www.motherjones.com/politics/2012/06/charts-womens-athletics-title-nine-ncaa/>.

⁸ Sabo, *Women's Sports Foundation*.

Demographic Makeup of the Women's Olympic Hockey Team

In regard to the Olympics, women were first welcomed to compete at the second modern Olympics in 1900, with only 12 females involved. The women participated in five individual sports including tennis, golf, sailing, croquet, and equestrian. It was not until 1960 when women became over 20% of the athletes competing in the Games. The first team sport to be open to women's participation was volleyball in 1964, followed by basketball and handball in 1976, field hockey in 1980, and soccer in 1996.⁹ This makes ice hockey, which debuted in the Olympics in 1998, the second most recent addition of a team sport open to women (behind rugby which became a women's event in 2016), and still the only traditional team sport offered for either men or women at the winter Olympics.

When analyzing women's ice hockey, it is first important to consider what sort of demographic characteristics make up the population of female hockey players. Research has suggested that ice hockey is the most expensive youth sport for both boys and girls, given the excessive amount of protective equipment required and having to pay for ice time. To put things in perspective, the average cost of all the equipment a child (adult equipment is much more expensive) would need to compete comes out to be about \$600, and this is not including the additional fees that parents must pay for the children to participate.¹⁰ Ken Campbell, a reporter and analyst for *The Hockey News*, published a book titled *Selling The Dream* about the timely and financial investments parents make when helping their children pursue ice hockey. Campbell explains that according the father of NHL player Matt Duchene, their family put over \$300,000

⁹ "Statistics: Women at the Olympic Games." Olympics. Fall 2019. Accessed April 2019. <https://www.olympic.org/women-in-sport/background/statistics>.

¹⁰ "Rounding Up The Usual Suspects: The Top Five Most Expensive Youth Sports." MomsTeam. Accessed April 2019. <https://www.momsteam.com/successful-parenting/rounding-up-usual-suspects-top-five-most-expensive-youth-sports>.

towards his hockey career growing up.¹¹ Paying to play on travel club teams outside of school, attending camps in the off season, and purchasing individual skills lessons are almost always part of the necessary package of investments a family must make to allow their child to end up playing in college, the NHL or NWHL, or the Olympics. For girls, most players who make it to the college level and beyond in hockey attended prestigious prep schools in the New England or Minnesota, which means the cost of a pricey tuition on top of the other prior investments. Hockey is also extremely time consuming compared to other sports, given the almost year long season and the excess amount of travel. With all of this being said, a hockey player's potential to reach an elite caliber of competition greatly depends on the family income and ability to devote enough time and money to develop them as a player.

The popularity of ice hockey is also very regionally specific in America. The top-level hockey players in the country tend to come from the Northeast and upper Midwest. These are the areas of the country where ice to play on is most available, meaning more people have the opportunity to play, and people can practice more consistently. When looking at the United States Women's 2018 Olympic roster, ten of the 23 members of the team are originally from Minnesota or Massachusetts, the two main "hockey hubs" of the country.¹² Given the majority financial and regional backgrounds of most hockey players, hockey tends to be a predominantly white sport. The implication is that when observing women's Olympic ice hockey and understanding its role in the fight for gender equity, the focus is specifically on upper class white

¹¹ Hull, Jeff. "NHL Hockey: How Much Are a Child's Hockey Dreams Worth?" Bleacher Report. October 03, 2013. Accessed April 2019. <https://bleacherreport.com/articles/1533035-nhl-hockey-how-much-are-a-childs-hockey-dreams-worth>.

¹² "U.S. Women's Olympic Ice Hockey Team." USA Hockey. Accessed April 2019. <https://teamusa.usahockey.com/page/show/3887046-2018-olympic-winter-games-u-s-women-s-roster>.

women, and cannot be misunderstood for a representation that encompasses all female athletes in America. While the hockey team definitely does face gender discrimination and inequality, their whiteness and class privilege does give them an advantage to begin with over female athletes of different demographics because they do not face additional racial discrimination or limitations that stem from being born into a lower socioeconomic class. Therefore, the experiences of the United States women's ice hockey team do not reflect those of all female athletes, putting some limitation on the scope of what a study of their team can offer.

Why Ice Hockey?

While other sports have been connected to the topic of gender equity since Title IX was passed, there has been far less discussion about how women's ice hockey has played a role in the landscape of female sports and continues to do so. Given that this sport has picked up momentum more recently over the past two decades since its Olympic debut, it can give a more modern perspective on the current state of equality in sports and the current image of the female athlete in a way that no other sport can offer right now. Ice hockey is also a traditionally male-dominated sport, so the female ice hockey player challenges the stereotypical athletic identity. This naturally draws excess media attention on the sport and its players, supplying plentiful opinionated and rich material to analyze when trying to understand how the media has shaped the way people think about women's hockey in the Olympics.

Helen Lenskyj: Olympic Critic and Expert

When discussing the social impact of the Olympics, it is essential to review the work of Helen Lenskyj, a Professor from the University of Toronto. She is a credible Olympic critic and

expert who has done a plethora of research on the intersection of gender, race and ethnicity, and social class within the Olympic industry. I began my own research by reading her book *Gender Politics and the Olympic Industry*, in which she argues that the Olympics have controlled and shaped hegemonic concepts of sport masculinities and femininities for its own profit and image.¹³ I was able to uncover several themes in her work that I could apply and incorporate into my own research, but I would also like to challenge some of her broader claims.

The first piece of her discussion that I found to show through in the materials I focused on was this idea that men are expected by society to establish their masculinities by *doing*, while women ascribe their feminine identity by simply *being*, with no proving necessary. She explains that when women do go beyond being into the realm of doing, by performing in a public space, they are subjected to much more scrutiny than men. This is extremely evident in the world of sports, since the premise of an athletic identity is about performance and self-representation through action. A woman's appearance, personality, and lifestyle are all taken into account when her achievements are being judged, which is why a lot of the discussion surrounding female athletes focuses on their personal lives more so than when male athletes are discussed.¹⁴

This relates to the second pillar of her work I found to be very prevalent, which emphasizes how mass media is powerfully responsible for creating social constructions and gender norms within the world of sports. In regard to skill level, competitive edge, and credibility, reaching Olympic status is considered the pinnacle achievement for any athlete competing in any sport. Rather than representing just yourself or your team, Olympians are given the honor to represent an entire nation and become a symbol of their country. With this being

¹³ Lenskyj, Helen Jefferson. *Gender Politics and the Olympic Industry*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, 12-13.

said, the Olympic platform receives far more attention and discussion on a worldwide scale than any other sports organization or event. With the Olympic Games receiving as wide of an audience as they do, the media narratives surrounding Olympic athletes and events become even more impressionable on the public. Lenskyj explains that it is through Olympics based media which people develop their sense of how they think certain athletes should carry themselves, what they should look like, who should be participating in which sports, etc. Selected athletes become the focus of media attention because they either conform to or challenge a specific stereotypical athletic identity based on their gender, race, or ethnicity. She gives the example of an African American Olympic sprinter as one that conforms to this stereotypical athletic identity, while a Muslim sportswoman challenges the stereotype. These athletes often become subjects of popular “human interest” or “overcoming adversity” narratives in the media.¹⁵ The media’s visual and written representations of female ice hockey players demonstrate if and when these athletes have been embraced and praised at best, or ridiculed, for playing a “man’s sport,” at worst.

One of Lenskyj’s deeper central ideas is her belief that the history of women and sport is really a history of male control over female sexuality. She believes that the Olympics as an event and the International Olympic Committee serve as modes of hegemonic oppression. She strongly rejects the “leveling the playing field” solution, which suggests using a dominant group, in this case men, as a yardstick or golden standard to measure the progress of a subordinate group, in this case women, where the perpetual goal of the latter group is to catch up with the former. She believes that the use of this comparison forever labels female athletes as the inferior, and that having a goal of reaching numerical parity to achieve social justice in sport is inadequate. With

¹⁵ Ibid, 22-23.

this being said, she therefore suggests that equal Olympic opportunity would not yield benefits for female athletes.¹⁶

My Reactions and Challenges

After performing my own research, I have found that there is indeed a lot of evidence of male control and dominance in sports, and a large presence of gender discrimination. I also agree with Lenskyj in that simply supplying equal opportunity will not solve the issue of gender equality in sports, since that doesn't necessarily change people's deep-rooted ideologies. Title IX technically "leveled the playing field", but it is clear we as a society are not even close to reaching true gender equality in sports. Female athletes are often paid much less than their male counterparts, given much fewer amenities by their organization, school, or employing federation, and spoken about differently in the media. This shows the persisting hegemonic and patriarchal ideologies in our society that have continued to push female athletes below their male counterparts. Just because institutions are forced to supply opportunity doesn't mean entirely fair treatment is enforced as well. "Leveling the playing field" is not enough, and that is evident throughout my own research.

Despite my agreement of these terms, I would like to challenge some of Lenskyj's ideas by first saying that based on what I have observed in my research, the Olympics is not an oppressive platform on its own, and it is indeed a tool that can be used to further progress the fight for gender equality because of the mass attention it receives. There is discrimination present in the Olympics, as there is with most other major sports organizations, but it is not the platform that creates these discriminatory ideologies or inequalities, it has only absorbed them. I do not

¹⁶ Ibid, 42-43.

believe the Olympics enforce policies that directly oppress female athletes, nor do I believe that female sexuality is under attack or controlled by the ideals put forth by the Olympics. Second, I believe that sometimes it is necessary to use the “yardstick” comparing the progress of female athletes to male athletes in order to fully grasp how unequal certain conditions are. When talking about more tangible characteristics like wage, I think the comparison is applicable. However, it is not always fitting, such as in rhetorical practices that encompass the classic “throw like a girl” connotation, which only continues to reinforce male superiority and female inferiority in sports.

My work focuses on media narratives surrounding what I believe to be the two major moments in women’s ice hockey history in America: first, the debut of the event at the 1998 Olympics when America won the gold medal, and second, the era between the national team’s labor dispute in 2017 and their second gold medal victory at the 2018 Olympic Games. To understand the common narratives at each moment, I examined visual representations in magazines and advertisements, the rhetoric and language used in popular newspaper and magazine articles, social media accounts of athletes and sports federations, as well as the available sponsorships and economic opportunities for these athletes. I used these materials to aim at answering the following questions: 1. How do media portrayals affect society’s perspective of what the women’s ice hockey player, or the female athlete in general, was “supposed” to be at each of these moments? 2. What, if anything, have these moments done for the growth of women’s ice hockey? 3. What, if anything, have these moments done for the bigger picture of gender equality in sports?

Chapter One: Nagano 1998: The Olympic Debut of Women's Ice Hockey

It is February 17th, 1998 in Nagano, Japan, and Team USA has just defeated Team Canada in the gold medal game of the inaugural tournament for women's ice hockey in the Olympic Games. As the sound of the third period buzzer solidified their victory, Team USA burst into epic celebration on the ice, their eyes filled with tears of joy and exhaustion, and American flags draped around their backs. "I needed that flag around me because 20 members of this team represent this country and I'm so proud to be an American," American forward Karyn Bye said after she circled the ice wrapped in red, white, and blue. "I don't know if it's sank in yet, but I guess we're making history right now."¹⁷ Both teams lined up to receive their medals as the star-spangled banner blasted throughout the arena over the chants and cheers from fans, as each player began to soak in the gravity of the moment they just created together, win or lose. "When they showed U.S. captain Cammi Granato's face on the big screen and the medal around her neck, my feelings changed completely," stated Canadian head coach Shannon Miller. "I realized a gold medal was being hung around the neck of a female hockey player, and I couldn't believe the effect it had on me."¹⁸ During the post-game on-ice celebration, Cammi Granato added "I hope this has a big impact on young girls and boys. It's about time women's hockey got some exposure."¹⁹ While there was a clear divide of emotion on the ice between the two teams during this historical moment, each player's skill and passion for the sport exemplified throughout the game showed everyone watching across the globe the potential women had as

¹⁷ Thompson, Harry. "Time to Shine." USA Hockey. February 17, 2018. Accessed February 2019. https://teamusa.usahockey.com/news_article/show/888011.

¹⁸ Wilbon, Michael. "One Giant Leap for Womankind." The Washington Post. February 18, 1998. Accessed September 2018. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/sports/longterm/olympics1998/sport/hockey/articles/wilbon18.htm?noredirect=on>.

¹⁹ Thompson, "Time to Shine."

fierce competitors and relentless athletes. The question to be asked is what sort of ripple effect this moment would have for the growth of women in sports, and their long battle towards equality.

Media Narratives

When the decision was made for women's ice hockey to become an Olympic sport, it was inevitable that it would become a topic of discussion in the media. The time in which this happened is critical to the attention it received, since mass media was exploding in the late 1990s as the internet emerged onto the scene, bringing a whole new level of accessible media outlets shaping the way the public viewed what was happening. Before attempting to look at *if* and *how* the emergence of women's ice hockey into the Olympics or the gold medal game alone has come to play a significant role in women's equality in sports, one must understand the media portrayals and discussions of this event and these athletes back in 1998. What were people hoping to come out of all this? What were the doubts that others had in mind? Mary Jo Kane, a sports psychologist of the University of Minnesota, questioned "Will the coverage focus on women's ice hockey players' personal lives, their boyfriends, their eating disorders? Or more on their athleticism?" in regard to how women's ice hockey would be portrayed during the '98 Games.²⁰ The qualitative aspects of media coverage such as images in magazines, the language used in newspaper articles and stories, as well as sponsorships and economic opportunities for certain athletes, all contribute to this idea of what the women's ice hockey player, or female athlete in general, was "supposed" to be at this time.

²⁰ Weiner, Jay. "Checking Sequins at the Door; As a Team Sport That Is Full of Grit and Not Glamour, Ice Hockey Provides an Alternative to the Traditional Women's Sports of the Winter Games." *Star Tribune*, January 25, 1998. Accessed September 2018.

The common narrative of magazines and newspapers discussing women's Olympic ice hockey was often a hopeful one, emphasizing the idea that there was now an end goal or a "place to go" for young female hockey players. Even in Canada, where hockey serves as the country's past time which women have been involved with for longer than in the United States, the sport becoming an Olympic event for women seemed to be viewed as a pivotal change. Canadian Hayley Wickenheiser, considered to be the best female hockey player in the world in 1998, was the focus of a short *Sports Illustrated* story in February 1998 as the Olympic games were just getting started. The article reflects on her family's hesitation to help her pursue hockey when she was younger because of the lack of opportunity the sport had to offer at the time. "She was a good athlete in all sports- softball, volleyball, basketball. I told her these were sports with an upside. She should concentrate on them. Hockey, I said, really didn't have a future," Hayley's father stated. The article highlights that because of the creation of the first World Championship for women's ice hockey in 1990, and the decision to make the sport an Olympic event, young female hockey players no longer have to contemplate whether the time and economic commitments that ice hockey demands are worth it, since the truly talented players now had a high level to aspire to reach in the sport.²¹

It is also important to mention that making women's ice hockey an Olympic event was the first time a traditional team sport for women in general became a part of the Winter Olympic Games. The typical events that women had previously been able to compete in, such as figure skating, speed skating, or alpine skiing, are all individual sports, where fans are focused on cheering for a singular participant, rather than the group of participants representing a country for that event. Americans love teams, as more people feel they can connect and relate to

²¹ Montville, Leigh. "Hayley Wickenheiser." *Sports Illustrated*, February 9, 1998.

camaraderie and joint work ethic of a group than the self-motivation of an individual. As executive director of USA hockey in 1998 stated, “Michelle Kwan is competing against Smith and Jones,” in reference to America’s top figure skates at the time. “But we’re watching our team against other countries [when watching hockey], in a nationalistic, good way.”²² For the first time in the winter Olympics, women were able to proudly display that they too possessed honorable characteristics and traits that come along with being an effective team player and leader for the world to see.

In *Sports Illustrated*’s March 1998 end of Olympics recap story, a photo of U.S. women’s hockey player Karyn Bye proudly holding up an American flag in celebration of their gold medal was featured on the two-page title spread for the section. “Joy Ride,” the name of the full 20-page story, includes subsections dedicated to each event, with women’s ice hockey receiving its own multi-page write-up titled “Golden Girls.” The story labels the team’s success as “America’s feel good story of the Winter Games,” and goes on to frame the presence of women’s ice hockey in the Olympics as a victory in and of itself for women in sports. The author views the turnout of the event as evidence that women never lacked the strength or will to compete in the grittier sports, just the opportunity. He references Billie Jean King, a key player in the birth of Title IX two decades prior, and how after the 1998 Olympics, “U.S. female athletic heroes don’t have to play what King called ‘good clothes sports,’” such as tennis, golf, or figure skating.²³

It is important to note that this idea that society’s attitudes towards women in sports were expanding came from *Sports Illustrated*, one of the most well acclaimed and well-known media

²² Weiner, “Checking Sequins...”

²³ Howard, Johnette. "Golden Girls." *Sports Illustrated*, March 2, 1998.

sources for sports related news and analysis. This is a magazine whose writers, publishers, and readers have historically been predominantly male. The optimistic tone of this article and the light this edition shed on the women's ice hockey team not only reflects what female athletes were just *hoping* to see in the future, but what both men and women were *expecting* to result from these Olympic Games.

The sport's debut in the Olympics was gaining press from more female oriented media sources as well, often written with similar hopeful connotations, while simultaneously trying to incorporate certain gender norms and expected femininities of the time. The inclusion of subtle stereotypical feminine ideals was an attempt to make up for the fact that ice hockey was viewed as too masculine of a sport for women to excel in. Many media stories in female targeting magazines, such as *Seventeen*, included mentions or narratives surrounding how many of the players in the Olympic tournament grew up playing on boys' teams.²⁴ A girl playing on a boys' team seemed like nothing exceptional to anyone involved in the girls' hockey world, but to others at the time, the thought of young girls not only playing a sport like hockey, but playing it with a bunch of boys, seemed like a radical concept.

A *Chatelaine* article titled "Gold & Girls" begins with "for years [women] have put up with ill-fitting skates, lousy ice times and equipment made for men. Now suddenly, women hockey players are hot..."²⁵ The use of the word "hot" almost makes the idea of women playing ice hockey sound like a new fad or trend. The multiple interpretations of the word "hot" could also raise questions regarding whether or not the men's team would have ever been described in

²⁴ Thompson, Carmen Renee, Noelle Howey, Marlien Rentmeester, and Michele Meyer. "Going for Glory: Health Buzz." *Seventeen*, 12, 1997, 70-77,

<https://search.proquest.com/docview/1870591026?accountid=14405>.

²⁵ Kuitenbrouwer, Peter. "Gold & Girls," *Chatelaine*, 02, 1998, 36-37, 39, 41, 43,

<https://search.proquest.com/docview/1715607153?accountid=14405>.

the same way. In a February '98 issue of *Vogue*, a small blurb in the "Fitness Notes" section of the magazine explains how Louisville, a sports equipment company, began manufacturing the first ever ice hockey gloves made specifically for women. "Ice hockey used to be a man's sport. Men hit the puck harder and passed it with more finesse. Women just couldn't compete. But how could they? They had no gloves," the article states. Behind the blurb is a large photo of a Louisville glove holding a pink, flowery handbag with beauty products and a hockey puck inside, a use of imagery that seems to force femininity into the picture.²⁶ A parallel situation would be something along the lines of including something stereotypically masculine, such as a truck or beer, in a feature discussing a brand of men's figure skates, since figure skating is typically viewed as more of a feminine sport. This latter situation would be overtly odd to see in a magazine, but the former is clearly more inconspicuous.

It is important to understand *why* the image shown in the *Vogue* advertisement is thought of as less noticeable or problematic, while this made up parallel scenario would raise some eyebrows. Patriarchy can be invisible in our society, and that is how it prevails. Media is a catalyst in allowing patriarchal ideas to function because it has trained people to become accustomed to seeing and hearing about certain ideas versus others in relation to how we should think about gender. Many patriarchal ideologies are so deeply ingrained in the way people think that we often fail to realize its presence in our everyday lives, and instead we accept things the way they are, without questioning its obscurities.

In each of these articles, the intentions of the writers and publishers were good; they wanted to discuss something new and exciting for female athletes and align themselves with

²⁶ Chen, Joanne. "Fitness Notes: Getting a Grip/Dance Variations." *Vogue*, Feb 01, 1998, 154, <https://search.proquest.com/docview/904354067?accountid=14405>.

supporting “a good cause” such as female empowerment or equality. However, a lot of this discussion was triggered by people’s perplexity or naive fascination with the idea of women playing ice hockey. The growth of the sport challenged hegemonic ideas of sporting masculinities and femininities, and therefore a lot of the media at this point reflected society’s subliminal feeling of discomfort with this new idea. This resulted in the forcing of traditional or expected femininities into the discussion, in order to “balance out” the fact that women were playing a sport that was thought of as overly masculine. These subtle undertones of the rhetoric and imagery of these media sources reveal that at this time in 1998, society still viewed such a thing as women playing ice hockey as progressive, radical, and far from normal.

On the other hand, there was also some media discussion that criticized women’s ice hockey becoming an Olympic event in the first place. In the *Sports Illustrated* edition published immediately before the “Joy Ride” edition, critics bash the International Olympic Committee for prematurely adding the sport into the Olympics. The short piece begins with the blunt statement “It was a politically correct, TV-savvy International Olympic Committee that rushed women’s hockey into these Winter Games.” The reasoning for this strong opinion was the lack of depth in the tournament, with the United States and Canada being the only “two real heavyweights, teams that play with speed, toughness and a clue,” in comparison to the other four countries participating (Finland, China, Sweden and Japan). The story closes with the line “Until then [the gold medal game], you can leave women’s hockey off your radar screen...if it wasn’t already.”²⁷ There is some truth to this argument, given that the United States and Canada were out-scoring other teams throughout the tournament with large goal differentials as high as 10. However,

²⁷ "In Nagano, 2 4=2." *Sports Illustrated*, February 16, 1998, 24.

unlike the generally encouraging attitudes of the other articles discussed, this piece depicted an outwardly critical and even demeaning tone to it.

While one could argue that the game of women's ice hockey was not yet developed enough throughout the world to become an Olympic sport, waiting longer to make it an event would only postpone the kickstart in growth it needed. In retrospect, adding women's hockey to the Olympic program served as a catalyst allowing the game to gain the public attention it needed to increase its participation in places where the skill level was in need of improvement. Indeed, did the sport's presence in the Olympics draw in more participation amongst young girls. Girl's ice hockey had already been slowly growing throughout the 1990s, with participation increasing from 5,573 female players in 1990 to more than 25,000 in the 1997-1998 season, according to USA Hockey.²⁸ In a span of only two years after the Americans won the gold medal, USA Hockey's female registration increased by 50 percent, and all-female hockey teams increased by 40 percent.²⁹

Some of the criticisms of the women's hockey at the time stemmed from stubborn opinions that couldn't accept the innate differences between the focuses of the women's game in comparison to those of the men's game. When people attend collegiate, NHL or Olympic men's ice hockey games, the excitement from the stands often reaches its climax when gloves are dropped and a fight breaks out, or a rough check is thrown. The men's game is extremely

²⁸ Strege, Dave. "Their Own Game; Hockey: The U.S. women's Olympic gold-medal success spurs a growth spurt in the once male-dominated game of ice hockey." *Orange County Register (California)*. March 26, 1998.

<https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:3SCR-D880-0092-Y341-00000-00&context=1516831>.

²⁹ Rosenberg, Sari. "February 17, 1998: Team USA Won the First Olympic Gold Medal in Women's Ice Hockey." Lifetime. February 17, 2018. Accessed February 2018. <https://www.mylifetime.com/she-did-that/february-17-1998-team-usa-won-the-first-olympic-gold-medal-in-womens-ice-hockey>.

physical, and “runs on brute strength, ego and cash,” as *Chatelaine* put it.³⁰ The women’s game, on the other hand, has never allowed body checking and is therefore more focused on precise skill and speed. Not to claim that the men’s game does not have a huge emphasis on these factors, but physical strength and size definitely serve as defining roles of play. Simply said, they are two very different games.

There was some talk prior to the 1998 games questioning Canadian coach Shannon Miller’s preparedness to coach such a high-level team. However, Miller viewed herself as having an advantage over the male coaches of the tournament, such as American head coach Ben Smith, because of her years of experience in the women’s game specifically, while the others knew the men’s game. “Women’s hockey is a very purist game. Your soul intention isn’t to run somebody over, causing injury. People see the women’s game as something they remember from days gone by,” she stated.³¹ She refers to the “days gone by” meaning times when men’s hockey players put less of an intense emphasis on throwing each other into the boards. While some definitely disregarded women’s hockey because of the partial lack of physicality, others agreed with Miller in viewing the game’s core values to be almost refreshing. The *Chatelaine* article added that “many fans are sick of the big goons and pampered crybabies of the NHL,” and the addition of the women’s game in the Olympics became a nice change for hockey fans to turn their attention to.³²

The reluctance of some people to give the female Olympic hockey the time of day in 1998 can be attributed to a subconscious phenomenon held by men, originally suggested by Helen Lenskyj, that men inherently try to “protect” their sport territory from female “intruders.”

³⁰ Kuitenbrouwer, "Gold & Girls."

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

She claims that female participation in predominantly male sports “demystifies and dilutes sport’s power to define what it takes to be a man.”³³ In other words, women playing hockey can be viewed to take away or discredit the “manly” characteristics associated with the sport.

Therefore, men become subliminally protective over it and prefer women to not be involved.

This phenomenon is subtly referenced in the same *Chatelaine* article when the author stated, “The secret-jealously guarded by boys and men for close to a century- is out: hockey is the most fun going.”³⁴ The phrase “jealously guarded” refers to the protective nature of men over certain sports, discouraging any sort of “interruption” brought about by women.

Economic Opportunity

A very consistent thread throughout much of the media discussion of women’s Olympic ice hockey in 1998 was about the economic opportunity, or lack thereof, for the players in comparison to their male counterparts. Different sources discussed the topic with different connotations or levels of criticism, but there was a clear economic disadvantage for female Olympians. These athletes spend months, even years training for the brief two week long Olympic tournament, but many do not have much commercial opportunity to compensate for the time they are devoting to their sport. The Canadian team began their training camp in September 1997, and the American team even earlier in the summer. The two teams competed in a 13-game tour across North America as part of their pre-Olympic training, with the American team rostering 25 women, even though they knew more cuts would be made after the tour was completed. With this being said, these women were taking the risk of giving up their jobs or

³³ Lenskyj, 25-26.

³⁴ Kuitenbrouwer, "Gold & Girls."

taking time off from school, knowing there was a chance they would be cut from the final Olympic roster. U.S. forward Gretchen Ulion recalls stating to head coach Ben Smith “I have a job to go back to. I should be starting my career. Where do I stand in all of this?”³⁵ Prior to when they dove into the months of pre-Olympic training and practice tournaments, many of the players were scrambling to make enough money to be able to put their careers and jobs on almost a year long hiatus and have enough to pick up somewhere once the Games ended. A.J. Mleczko, another forward on the American team, once explained that to save money in between playing hockey and finding odd jobs, she “lived out of suitcases in her car-- a 1988 Isuzu Trooper. She occasionally stays in a friend’s studio apartment in Boston. Some nights, she stays with her sister, sleeping in the same bed because there is little space.”³⁶

From September onward, the Canadian team members were each being paid \$1865 a month. In the *Sports Illustrated* feature on Hayley Wickenheiser, the author quickly mentions her earnings and states “She is making a living off women’s hockey! It is a radical concept,” and later includes a quote from Hayley stating, “Maybe it’s not the money that men make...but we’re professional hockey players.”³⁷ In this scenario, the unequal pay is acknowledged, but in a sort of content “we’ll take what we get” manner. There is a light being shed on the fact that the female players are being paid for the first time, while ignoring the obvious issue of inequality. In reality, yes, Wickenheiser and the rest of the team are being paid to play, but the small stipend is not

³⁵ "20 Years Later: An Oral History of the 1998 U.S. Women's Hockey Team." WFLA. February 08, 2018. Accessed October 2018. <https://www.wfla.com/news/20-years-later-an-oral-history-of-the-1998-u-s-womens-hockey-team/1030524955>.

³⁶ Shipley, Amy. "For Women, a Miracle on Ice; Olympic Ice Hockey Is No Longer Just for Men". *The Washington Post*. April 04, 1997. <https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:3S7T-8M20-009B-N07G-00000-00&context=1516831>.

³⁷ Montville, "Hayley Wickenheiser."

enough to make a living off of, as the article suggests. In contrast, when *Chatelaine* magazine discussed Wickenheiser and how much she is being paid, the author was more deliberate in what sort of compensation is really being offered. It clearly addresses that the pay “is not enough to make this whole endeavor anything but a labor of love. Most team members spent the summer juggling jobs and trying to save enough money so they could quit working during the pre-Olympic training period.”³⁸ Here, the struggle for the players is definitely acknowledged, but there is still a sort of tunnel vision focus on the good that women’s ice hockey in the Olympics is bringing about.

The same sort of reference was made in closing section of the *Sports Illustrated* “Joy Ride” article. While the article focuses on the strides the team made for women in sports, and ice hockey specifically, it only briefly acknowledges the tough position these women are put in once they must return to “reality” after the Olympics, when the International Olympic Committee is no longer supporting them financially. “And now? ‘It’s back to the unemployment line,’ said defenseman Vicki Movessian, who gave up her accounting job with Prudential to train for Nagano,” it states. An interesting contrast to the common narrative that the women are far underpaid is exemplified in a different quote by Movessian, in which she stated “It’s enough for us to live off of. We honestly live such simple lives. We do nothing but think hockey and getting strong.”³⁹ On the one hand, maybe the lifestyle of these women when they’d be traveling with the team or when the actual tournament was going on did not require much financial support. Outside of this safety net of being in season, however, they were not making enough to fully support themselves on their own without another source of income. It could be assumed that

³⁸ Kuitenbrouwer, "Gold & Girls."

³⁹ Howard, "Golden Girls."

many of these women were receiving financial help from their families, given the upper-class upbringing most of them came from. Movessian's statement was made with the same sort of blindness that many of these articles appear to have; with such a strong focus on the excitement that women ice hockey players were being paid anything at all, there was no attention being paid to how much it actually was.

When analyzing the economic compensation of the women's ice hockey team, it is useful to make comparisons to other female teams of the same level, rather than just their male counterpart. The U.S. women's soccer team, for example, won an Olympic gold medal at the 1996 Games and won the 1999 World Cup, similar achievements of the U.S. women's hockey team at the time. However, many members of the soccer team were making close to \$100,000 a year at this time, from their federation, sponsors, and endorsements, while members of the hockey team were making only a small fraction of this and coming across far fewer sponsorship opportunities. The disparities in this can be explained by the greater number of female soccer players and wider fan base throughout the country in comparison to the more intimate and regionally specific female hockey population. At this time there were over 7 million female soccer players in the United States, and the national team was filling 60,000 seat stadiums and drawing large television audiences.⁴⁰ Therefore, the hockey team's deficit in financial benefits is not solely because of their gender, but also has to do with who and how many people are watching the events, the profits the crowds bring in, and the success of the team. As the number

⁴⁰ Weiner, Jay. "Women's World Hockey Championships: Women still skate obstacle course," *Star Tribune (Minneapolis, MN)*. April 1, 2001, [//advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:42R6-P0X0-00J2-305G-00000-00&context=1516831](http://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:42R6-P0X0-00J2-305G-00000-00&context=1516831).

of female hockey players rose and more people tuned in to the sport after its Olympic debut, these numbers would eventually rise to look more similar to those of women's soccer.

One point to also keep in mind is that the International Olympic Committee does not actually pay athletes, male or female, anything at all just for competing in the Olympics. Whether or not Olympians receive any sort of set salary, and if so, how much it is worth, is determined by each individual country's national Olympic organization. The United States Olympic Committee (USOC) required its athletes to remain amateur, implying they could not receive any sort of compensation for their sport, until 1978 when the Ted Stevens Olympic and Amateur Sports Act was adopted. This allowed U.S. Olympic Athletes to receive various funding sources, such as financial awards, sponsorship from national organizations or private businesses, or payment.⁴¹ Between 2005 and 2008, the United States Olympic Committee made \$625M annually from just United States-only broadcast rights. They also annually acquired \$120M from corporate sponsors. The USOC then distributes some portion of this revenue to fund the national governing bodies for each sport, such as USA Hockey, to cover the costs of technology, shipping equipment overseas, travel expenses for the athletes, etc. The USOC also pays athletes medal bonuses to those who succeed in their events. Since the late 1990s-early 2000s, \$25K have been awarded to gold medalists, \$15K for silver, and \$10K for bronze. However, for team events, these bonuses are split amongst each member, so the final profit becomes much less. Because these rates have stayed consistent for so many years, their value has declined due to inflation. No

⁴¹ Taylor, Adam. "Here's How Much Olympic Athletes Really Get Paid." Business Insider. July 19, 2012. Accessed October 2018. <https://www.businessinsider.com/heres-how-much-olympic-athletes-really-get-paid-2012-7>.

portion of the USOC's income, however, is put toward providing American Olympians with a set salary of any kind.⁴²

The greatest economic success for Olympic athletes tends to come from sponsorship, endorsement, or spokesperson deals. The opportunities for such deals are limited and depend heavily on an athlete or team's success in the Olympic Games, since most companies are only looking to feature the household names or medal winners in their advertisements. After the women's hockey team won gold in 1998, the only player who really received such opportunity with legit economic rewards was team captain Cammi Granato. She earned endorsement deals from companies including Nike, AT&T, CBS Sports Line, and General Motors. In several of the advertisements she was featured in, she was used as a sort of symbol of empowerment for female athletes. One Nike commercial titled "Poetry in Motion" as a part of Nike's women's sports initiative, featured professional poets and young girls reading their own poems that celebrated and promoted female athletes. Several of the girls selected to read their poem were students from Granato's former high school, and clips of Granato playing hockey were shown as the poems were being read.⁴³ Other than Granato, however, few other members of the '98 team came across similar individual endorsement opportunities. Nova Lanktree, who in 1998 was the director of Burns Sports where she was responsible for the company's top celebrity endorsements, stated "Granato had some nice relative success. But besides her, it's like a desert [of other recognizable women hockey players]." As a team, they did get featured on the post-Olympics Wheaties cereal box, were featured on the *Late Show with David Letterman* to read a Top Ten List titled "Cool

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Kelly, Jane Irene. "Poetry in Motion: Nike Salutes Women Athletes." AdWeek. February 09, 1998. Accessed October 2019. <https://www.adweek.com/brand-marketing/poetry-motion-nike-salutes-women-athletes-42850/>.

Things about Winning an Olympic Gold Medal” immediately after the victory, and made several other media appearances.⁴⁴ However, the compensation for any of these endorsements that went directly to the team was split between each member, resulting in not much.

Alternative methods of funding are sometimes available to certain Olympic athletes in the United States from larger American companies or foundations looking to support athletes with Olympic potential. The Olympic Job Opportunities Program works with large corporate businesses who partner with the USOC willing to provide Olympians with full-time salaries for working only part-time, allowing athletes the time to train for their sport while still having a sufficient income. Some athletes rely on grants provided by corporate-backed foundations, such as The Ross Powers Foundation, which has provided athletes training for the Olympics with financial support since 2001. This program was founded by Ross Powers, an American Snowboarder who won a bronze medal at the 1998 Olympics and gold in 2002.⁴⁵

In any sort of discussion regarding women’s ice hockey in the Olympics, whether the topic at hand is the focus of the game itself, the way in which the media frames the sport, the economic benefits the players receive, etc., the level of expectation comes from a comparison to the men’s game. This repetitive comparison can be looked at in two ways. The first view accepts this constant comparison, and finds it to be expected, since men’s hockey was around first and has had years to build itself up, and therefore is viewed as an unquestioned societal norm. Hence, the bar for which women’s ice hockey inevitably should strive to reach is where the men are in each aspect of the sport. This idea is tied to the “leveling the playing field” solution for gender

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ "How Olympic Athletes Make a Living." Sports Management Degree Hub. Accessed November 2018. <https://www.sportsmanagementdegreehub.com/olympic-athletes-salaries/>.

inequality, the belief that if the quantity of opportunity for women in sports is the same as that for men, then equality has been reached.⁴⁶

On the other hand, some people view this comparison of women to men as condescending, irrational, and ineffective. In this case, it is believed that women should not treat the level of wherever men have reached in terms of skill, attention received, compensation, etc. as the gold standard of achievement. This only puts women in a forever inferior position below men in the world of sports. Sports psychologist Mary Jo Kane criticizes how this comparison is commonly used in rhetoric by stating:

When you physically see a woman participating in a sport traditionally associated with men, you often hear announcers said, ‘Wow, she just hit that puck like a man!’ What that does is reinforce the notion that men are the superior athletes and women just can’t do it as well. It’s meant as the ultimate compliment and not as a put down that she ‘hit like a man.’ But it recasts the woman hockey player as male or as somebody who possesses male-like qualities. Not, she’s female and females can do this. It’s very subtle and insidious.⁴⁷

This view therefore rejects the “leveling the playing field” solution, referred to by critics and scholars as the western liberal feminist approach, since just creating more opportunity for women does not supposedly address or solve the deeper rooted hegemonic and ideological problems in society that allow gender inequalities to persist.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Lenskyj, 42-43.

⁴⁷ Weiner, "Checking Sequins..."

⁴⁸ Lenskyj, 42-43.

2002 Olympic Games in the Media

The commentary and rhetoric in mass media about women's Olympic ice hockey leading up to and during the 2002 Winter Games provides some insight into how the sport's debut at Nagano shaped the immediate years to come for female ice hockey players. A thread through most of the discussion of the 2002 Salt Lake City Games is one that does look back on Nagano as the trail blazing event that sparked the world's interest in women's ice hockey. In only four short years, the public was able to reflect on the initial Games and see its effects. As one article in the *Deseret News* put it, "This is the new millennium in which the sport's female athletes own a sizable share of the spotlight. With their first Olympic ice hockey competition in 1998, the women arguably fostered and invigorated a whole new generation -- certainly a new gender -- of hockey enthusiasts."⁴⁹

Much discussion also included concrete, statistical evidence of Nagano's effects, such as references to the spark of female registrations with USA Hockey between 1998 and 2002, the growth of the Olympic tournament, the number of nations with women's programs, and the growing crowds attracted by women's ice hockey games. The Women's tournament at the Salt Lake City Olympics included eight teams rather than just the six who competed in the previous tournament, with Russia, Kazakhstan and Germany joining in and Japan not making the cut. As of 2002, there were 26 countries around the world with girls' and women's ice hockey programs, a dramatic increase from what existed prior to 1998. During this four-year period, as the American and Canadian national teams competed in pre-Olympic tours, the number of spectators of the games were continuing to grow. In January 2001, the U.S. beat Canada before 9,562

⁴⁹ Van Eyck, Zack. "Women Stake Claim to Hockey," *Deseret News (Salt Lake City)*. January 17, 2002, <https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:44XW-9SH0-010F-H0J6-00000-00&context=1516831>.

spectators at the Pepsi Centre in Denver as part of the NHL all-star festivities. The crowd was the largest to ever watch a women's hockey game in the U.S. A year later this record was broken, when the U.S. and Canada played an exhibition game before a crowd of 10,158 in Detroit's Joe Louis Arena.⁵⁰

Even in Canada, where ice hockey is the country's past time, and where women have been playing for longer, there was a jump in female participation between the two Olympic Games. In 2002, Nancy Drolet, a key member of Canada's 1998 team, stated:

The game got a new start with the Olympics and instead of just people within women's hockey watching the whole world was watching. Now we are moving to where some women are starting to be able to make a living at this, to train full time and devote their lives to the sport just as men have for years.⁵¹

With the favored Canadians being upset by the Americans in '98 and earning only a silver medal, the nation used this as a trigger to devote more time, effort, and money, into women's hockey to ensure a gold medal in the next Olympics. "The loss illustrated the need for things like sponsorship, media coverage, development and organization in this country," Drolet added. An under-22 women's hockey program was created to work as a feeder system for the Olympic team, acquiring the best talent around the country.⁵²

14 veterans of the 1998 American team continued onto the 2002 roster, and many news sources at the time included the personal opinions of players themselves on the relationship

⁵⁰ Murvosh, Marta. "Women's Ice Hockey on Upswing in Utah." *The Star Tribune*, February 21, 2002. Accessed November 2018.

⁵¹ Long, Wendy. "It's 365 to Salt Lake 2002." *The Vancouver Sun*, February 8, 2001.

⁵² *Ibid.*

between the 1998 and 2002 teams. Karyn Bye, assistant captain of both teams, explained the following at the start of the 2002 games:

Obviously, winning another gold medal, I can only imagine that it would be just as good. But the one in '98 will always be special because that's the first-time women's hockey had ever been in the Olympics. That was the first time a women's team had ever gone on tour like we did. We were the pioneers.⁵³

A.J. Mieczko, another key player for both squads, was inducted into the New England Women's Sports Hall of Fame in September 2002, where she gave a lengthy anecdote that described her speaking arrangements at elementary schools and how her reception changed between the 1998 and 2002 Olympics. Right after her Olympic debut, little boys would question why she would choose to play ice hockey as a young girl. Four years later, the commonly asked question became, "Why'd you have to play on a boys' team?" shortly followed by, "Why were there no girls' teams?"⁵⁴

Regarding discussion of the 2002 Games in isolation, there was definitely less of a "wow" factor regarding the idea of women's ice hockey. It had become less of a foreign concept thanks to the Olympics, so a lot of the media discussion was focused on key players to look out for, the training done by each team, and predictions about whether or not the United States would be able to defend their gold medal from Canada. A year before the start of the Games in Salt Lake City, a *Vancouver Sun* article predicted that "While the 2002 [women's ice hockey] tournament won't possess the intrigue it had as a debut sport in 1998, the game comes instead to Salt Lake City with an aura of credibility."⁵⁵ In regard to equality for women in sports, this

⁵³ Van Eyck, "Women Stake..."

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ Long, "It's 365 to Salt Lake 2002."

credibility is much preferred over the intrigue the public had four years prior. While the surprise factor included in discussion about women's ice hockey in 1998 was usually framed in a positive and well-intended way, it still made the sport seem unusual in regard to society's gender norms. However, the fact that this sort of theme was able to dissolve a little over four years and turn into a discussion more focused on the game and sport itself, similar to the way the men's game is discussed, shows the presence of a newer tone of acceptance and embrace of women's participation in the sport. Krissy Wendall, who joined the American team in 2002, stated "I think '98 opened up a lot of eyes to women's hockey. When I tell people I'm a hockey player, it's not so much of a surprise anymore."⁵⁶

Having the United States host the 2002 Olympics created even more of a surge of popularity of the women's game in North America. The location created much more immediate public exposure and buzz throughout American culture than would have been infiltrated if it had been held in a foreign city. With the highest level of women's hockey being played so close to home, more and more young girls were being encouraged to try it out. Between the 1995 bid announcement and the actual event in 2002, over a dozen new public rinks were built in Utah where the Games were held.⁵⁷ Prior to these additions, it was difficult for female ice hockey players to have access to any ice time having to battle for it with men's hockey teams, figure skaters, and recreational skating. Similar trends occurred in other areas of the country, allowing more available ice and opportunity for females. Now, two decades after the sport's Olympic debut, we are able to look beyond the immediate growth of the sport during the four-year period

⁵⁶ Van Eyck, "Women Stake..."

⁵⁷ Murvosh, "Women's Ice Hockey..."

between 1998 and 2002 to fully grasp what sort of role the Olympics have played in the advancement of women in hockey, and women in sports in general.

Chapter Two: Women's National Team Goes on Strike

Over the past two decades, the USA women's ice hockey team has typically only reached headlines every four years when the Winter Olympics come around. However, leading up to the 2018 Games, the team caught the forefront of the public eye by storm when they threatened to boycott the 2017 women's hockey World Championship tournament "unless significant progress has been made on the year-long negotiations with USA Hockey over fair wages and equitable support."⁵⁸ The strike began on March 15th, 2017, when two of the team's stars Hilary Knight and Amanda Kessel posted on their Twitter accounts explaining the team's position and request. They were asking USA Hockey for equitable support as required by the Ted Stevens Amateur Sports Act. They were specifically demanding more support in the areas of financial compensation, youth team development, equipment, travel expenses, hotel accommodations, meals, staffing, transportation, and marketing and publicity. "The goals of our requests are to receive fair treatment from USA Hockey, to initiate the appropriate steps to correct the outlined issues, and to move forward with a shared goal of promoting and growing girls and women in our sport while representing the United States," the two players included in their Tweets.⁵⁹

Negotiations had been in existence between the women on the team and USA Hockey for over a year prior this point. When it seemed no agreement would be made in the near future, the women felt giving USA Hockey a rushed ultimatum was the only way to prove they weren't joking around. With the world championship planned to start in Plymouth, Michigan on March 30th, USA Hockey was left with minimal options. They could either finally come up with a deal

⁵⁸ Zirin, Dave. "Here's Why the US Women's National Hockey Team Is Going on Strike." *The Nation*. March 16, 2017. Accessed December 2018. <https://www.thenation.com/article/heres-why-the-us-womens-national-hockey-team-is-going-on-strike/>.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

with the team to put the boycott to an end, embarrassingly forfeit the tournament as the host country, or scramble to form a new roster for the team.

Resisting the first option, USA Hockey spent the following week and a half trying to find alternate players, or scabs, for a replacement team, a decision that most of the media framed as embarrassingly desperate. They searched and asked players all across the nation to participate, starting at the highest tier of Division I or National Women's Hockey League players. Faced with rejection after rejection, the organization began seeking out players in Division III programs, high schools, u18 or u16 levels, and even "beer leagues," only to be turned down further.⁶⁰ For a young female hockey player, the opportunity to fill in as a scab in a coveted World Championship tournament is obviously incredibly tempting, but the mass resistance showed the power of the movement and the strong message the USA team members were able to put forward with their boycott. Many players who denied the opportunity to scab took to Twitter and reposted the "jab" statement at USA Hockey "Today I will do what others won't do so tomorrow I can do what others can't. I said no to USA Hockey and will not play in the 2017 World Championship. #BeBoldForChange." Anya Battaglino, a player on the Connecticut Whalers, and current director of the NWHL, told ESPN:

What it basically came down to for us is, 'How do we foster the continued growth and development of women's hockey if we're willing to play at worlds as scabs?' We're basically taking the position that if you're not for us, you're against us. I don't know of any player who told USA Hockey, yes.

⁶⁰ Zirin, Dave. "The US Women's Ice Hockey Team Is on Strike-and the Solidarity Is Stunning." *The Nation*. March 28, 2017. Accessed December 2018. <https://www.thenation.com/article/the-us-womens-ice-hockey-team-is-on-strike-and-the-solidarity-is-stunning/>.

She made this statement after she turned down the opportunity herself.⁶¹ The 2018 International Women's Day was only a week before the strike started, and this #BeBoldForChange hashtag was the theme of that year's IWD campaign. The hashtag soon became synonymous with the strike and tagged onto almost every social media post related to the team's movement.

Solidarity

Support was not only exhibited by those who refused the scabbing opportunity, but also from many other sports unions and professional athletes who proudly demonstrated their solidarity. The NHL Players Association released a supportive statement claiming the following:

NHL players fully support the U.S. Women's National Team's efforts to reach an equitable agreement with USA hockey. It is important that the best American women players be on the ice for the World Championship and the notion of seeking replacement players will only serve to make relations, now and in the future, much worse. We trust this dispute will be resolved fairly and quickly.⁶²

An NHL agent named Allan Walsh, whose clients include several top draft picks, also released a statement explaining that American NHL players on the men's national hockey team were considering boycotting their own World Championship if a fair deal was not agreed upon between the women's team and USA Hockey.⁶³ Players unions of the NFL, NBA, and MLB also

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ "USA Hockey, Women's National Team Strike Deal, Avoid Worlds Boycott." NBC Sports. March 28, 2017. Accessed December 2018. <https://olympics.nbcsports.com/2017/03/28/usa-hockey-womens-boycott-world-championship/>.

all made public statements expressing their solidarity and their belief that the women's team should be able to express their right to be treated fairly as athletes and workers.⁶⁴

Mike Eruzione, captain of the 1980 gold medal winning "Miracle on Ice" men's team, showed his support by tweeting "Good luck to the women's US hockey program as they hopefully can come to an agreement with USA Hockey. You have my support." Eruzione's alliance is especially credible because of his own association with USA Hockey, being an amateur athlete in 1980 selected by the organization for the Olympics.⁶⁵ Perhaps the most noteworthy or symbolic supporter of the women's team's actions was Billie Jean King, the face of the fight for gender equity in athletics. Captain of the women's team, Meghan Duggan, recalls getting off the ice after a practice in the midst of all this and seeing a text on her phone saying "Hey, Billie Jean King here. I heard what you girls are going through and want to lend any support that I can." In response to this text, Duggan told ESPN "I just flipped. You know you've made a splash when Billie Jean King reaches out. It makes me emotional to think about." King continued to show her support through numerous social media posts.⁶⁶ To be recognized and commended by the woman who spearheaded the Title IX movement and had a remarkable athletic career of her own, remaining one of the top paid female athletes ever, showed the great scale of the strike's impact. The women also received support from the federal government when 20 United States senators signed a letter addressed to the executive director of USA Hockey

⁶⁴ Zirin, "The US Women's..."

⁶⁵ Barca, Jerry. "U.S. Women's Hockey Strikes History-Making Deal." *Forbes*. March 29, 2017. Accessed December 2018. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/jerrybarca/2017/03/29/u-s-womens-hockey-strikes-history-making-deal/#7663900633e4>.

⁶⁶ Ain, Morty. "U.S. Women's Hockey Team: Our Fearless Year of Triumph." *ESPN The Magazine Body Issue*, July 5, 2017.

urging the organization to “resolve this dispute quickly to ensure that the USA Women’s National Hockey Team receives equitable resources.”⁶⁷

Regardless of whether or not a compromised deal would come about, the support given by a majority of the male dominated professional sports world was a victory in and of itself. The solidarity revealed that these women were being taken seriously as world class athletes, and that their demands were legit and not being underestimated. The strike gave anyone who had any sort of prominent voice in the sports world the chance to speak up about gender equality and create a sort of snowball effect in bringing more urgency and attention to this conversation.

The team’s determination and unwavering efforts proved them to be just as powerful off the ice as on. The strike was a risk that required plenty of courage for this group of women to put their careers on hold in order to make a very public, bold, semi-political decision such as this. Meghan Duggan explained in an ESPN interview that over the ten years she has been on the national team, it became more and more clear that it was up to the women on the team to change the way USA Hockey dealt with equitable treatment amongst its teams and programs. With the World Championships coming up, it seemed like the perfect time for them to make a sacrifice and put something on the line. In the same interview, Monique Lamoureux-Morando, another key player of the national team, stated the following:

In a non-Olympic year, that’s [the World Championship] our Stanley Cup. That’s what we train for, and we were absolutely willing to put that on the line because we knew we

⁶⁷ U.S. Senate. "Senators Call on USA Hockey to Treat Women's National Hockey Team Fairly." News release, March 27, 2017. Elizabeth Warren. <https://www.warren.senate.gov/newsroom/press-releases/senators-call-on-usa-hockey-to-treat-women-and-039s-national-hockey-team-fairly>.

were doing the right thing. We knew full-heartedly that this was the group that was going to change women's hockey in the U.S. It was the right thing to do for the next generation. While the veteran members of the team understood that this call for action had been a long time coming and now was the time, some of the rookie players had some difficulty feeling comfortable with it. Duggan recalls having a private conversation with one of the rookies who told her “I support this, I’m passionate about it, but it makes me really uncomfortable because this is my chance and I want to play.” Duggan sympathized with her, given that any young player who worked their whole life to compete at this level might feel like they’re betraying themselves by choosing to risk the opportunity to play. Buying into an “it takes a team” mentality, Duggan asked for her trust and she took it.⁶⁸

Agreement is Reached

Luckily for the members of the team, they no longer had to worry about not playing in the Championship when USA Hockey agreed to a compromised deal on March 28th, 2017, three days before the start of the tournament, that ensured “groundbreaking support” for the National Team program over the following four years. USA Hockey’s official release of the agreement did not include its financial terms, but did explain the following compromises:

The formation of a Women’s High Performance Advisory Group of former and current players from the U.S. Women’s National Team program, along with volunteer and staff leadership, to meet regularly to assist USA Hockey in efforts to advance girls’ and

⁶⁸ Ain, “U.S. Women’s Hockey Team...”

women's hockey in all areas, including programming, marketing, and promotion and fundraising.⁶⁹

Until these changes, girls' developmental programs received virtually nothing in comparison to the \$3.5 million the boys' program receives and the additional \$1.4 million USA Hockey provides the USHL, a top-tier league for 16- to 20-year-old boys.⁷⁰ The report also includes quotes from members of the team discussing the what the agreement has accomplished, as well as statements made by USA Hockey executives. "Today reflects everyone coming together and compromising in order to reach a resolution for the betterment of the sport," said Jim Smith, president of USA Hockey. "We'll now move forward together knowing we'll look back on this day as one of the most positive in the history of USA Hockey."⁷¹

Financial details of the report were revealed through exterior sources such as ESPN, and many of the team's requests were addressed. First off, the team's annual compensation will increase to about \$70,000 per player and could reach up to six figures through bonuses if they were to win a World Championship or an Olympic medal. The new contract grants every national team player a \$2,000 monthly stipend, regardless of the player's experience, from the USOC, and an additional \$2,000 per month from USA Hockey, leaving every player with a base salary of \$4,000 a month before any earned bonuses. Prior to this change, USA Hockey only paid each member of the women's national team during the six-month training period prior to each Olympic tournament, in which they earned a total of \$6,000 by the end of the Games.

⁶⁹ USA Hockey. "USA Hockey & USWNT Moving Forward Together." News release, March 28, 2017. USA Hockey. https://www.usahockey.com/news_article/show/773291.

⁷⁰ Howard, Johnette. "With Deal Reached, U.S. Women's National Hockey Team Will Play at World Championships." ESPN. March 29, 2017. Accessed December 2018. http://www.espn.com/olympics/story/_/id/19026627/usa-hockey-us-women-national-team-reach-agreement-avoid-boycott.

⁷¹ USA Hockey, "USA Hockey & USWNT..."

During the three-and-a-half-year period when they were not being paid by USA Hockey for Olympic training, they relied on the monthly stipend from the USOC. The amount was based on experience, so players could earn anywhere between \$750 and \$2000. For the first time, the women's team will also receive the same level of travel arrangements and insurance coverage as the men's team, bumping their per diem from \$15 to \$50 for non-travel days at events.⁷²

The strike also revealed the power social media has assumed in today's world, especially in regard to social and political movements. The strike initially reached the public through the players' Twitter posts, and every further movement throughout the two-and-a-half-week-long strike was demonstrated through Twitter as well. The reactions of those who turned down the scabbing positions, as well as the solidarity shown by the player's unions and other athletes were all viewable on social media for all of the world to see, creating more public discussion and attention towards the topic of gender equity and women in sports. The accessibility people have today to reach such a wide audience with the press of a button on their smartphone made it that much easier for anyone to show support for the women's team throughout their boycott. Not too long ago, there was no platform for people to so easily demonstrate their alliance or support for such social movements. Today, people no longer just internalize these movements, but can actually contribute to them. With the option we have today to speak up about something that might be trending on social media or a hot topic in news outlets, it is no surprise that a call for equality that thrived off of public support such as this strike happened when it did.

Other than the effect of technology and social media, the timing of this strike also had to do with a tension between the feelings of empowerment and disempowerment the national team had reached. On one hand, the national team was approaching its third decade of existence with a

⁷² Howard, "With Deal Reached..."

very considerable amount of success under its belt in both the World Championships and the Olympics. One could say that these tangible successes along the team's timeline made them feel more empowered than ever before, giving them the readiness to make such a public splash in the push for equality. On the other hand, the credibility of the team's longevity and consistent influx of championships made their lack of fair treatment from USA Hockey almost ironic. With all that the team had accomplished, including 18 world championship medals, eight gold and ten silver, as well as six Olympic medals, they still carried this sense of disempowerment due to the lack of acknowledgment by their governing body, which served as the motivation to act. It was a moment where their steady success could supplement as evidence for why they deserved what they were demanding.

Marie Claire, a primarily female oriented magazine that often covers health, beauty, and fashion topics, published an article focused on the strike in October 2017 after getting the chance to interview with Hilary Knight. One of the main focuses of the article was about the timing of the strike and why the team chose to act when they did after years of unequal treatment. "The catalyst for the Be Bold for Change campaign was an accumulation of years where we felt that the sport was really stagnant and we needed to fight for a better future," said Knight.⁷³ This statement coincides with the team's feeling of disempowerment caused by the static nature of their sport despite their previous efforts, which served as their motivation to take a bigger sort of step. A year and a half prior to the strike in February 2016, *Marie Claire* published an article titled "Will Female Pro-Hockey Players Ever Get What They're Worth?" which discussed the National Women's Hockey League, occupied by mostly Olympic and national team players, and

⁷³ Reslen, Eileen. "The U.S. Women's Hockey Team Has No Regrets About Fighting for Equal Treatment." *Marie Claire*, October 2, 2017.

the struggles they faced due to the wage gap. The magazine had interviewed Knight for this article as well, in which she was asked “Do you think you’re worth what you’re getting paid?” After rhetorically repeating the question with an edge to her tone, she responded “Absolutely not. I am worth way more than that.” Brianna Decker, Olympian and member of the NWHL’s Boston Pride, is also quoted in the story, stating “I would love to get paid as much as the Bruins because I think we deserve it. But I’ve played my entire career without getting paid, so I’m just playing for the love of the game and having fun with it.”⁷⁴ In retrospect, this earlier article and these specific quotes highlight the financial struggle these players had been facing for years and the public attention this issue was starting to receive, and how the decision to boycott the games was a long time coming.

Media Narratives

When discussing the strike, most media sources framed a narrative that focuses on the hopeful impact the strike and the resulting deal will have on the next generations of female ice hockey players and the future of the national team. The formation of the deal is also consistently labeled as a historic victory in the fight for women’s equality in athletics. *Sports Illustrated’s* online website posted an article immediately following the announcement of the deal being made that focused one of the team’s forwards, Jocelyne Lamoureux-Davidson, and what she believed the outcome of her team’s actions would be. The article explains the depth to which the creation of an advisory committee will play a role in helping women’s hockey gain exposure and take

⁷⁴ Stone, Avery. "Will Female Pro-Hockey Players Ever Get What They're Worth?" *Marie Claire*, February 24, 2016.

care of the sport's young and talented players rising to the highest tiers. It includes a quote from an interview with Lamoureux-Davidson, in which she explains:

The next generation has been at the forefront of our message this whole time and we want girls to be able to see women's national team players. We want them to see it on TV, on social media, and what they can see, they can dream that then. I think that piece [the advisory committee] of this negotiation has been underrated. [It's] going to help grow women's hockey from the grassroots level in the U.S. We're going to market our team more and hopefully have more visibility and basically, keep growing the sport.

The author then continues to explain how this next generation of female hockey players were equally attributed to the success and popularity of the strike as the actual national team.⁷⁵

Overall, the article's tone and message are both supportive and commendable regarding the team's courageous efforts.

The other prevailing media narrative about the strike was one that appreciated the team's actions, but made it very clear that there was still much work to be done for women's hockey in terms of gender equality. In April 2017, the *New York Times* published an article discussing the aftermath of the deal made between the national team and USA Hockey, and addressed the issues that remain. Hilary Knight is quoted in the article, stating "There are mentalities that need to be changed, because people aren't changed enough." One goal the women are still working on is increasing the diversity within USA Hockey's leadership. As of April 2017, when the *Times* article was published, only 15 of the 91 voting board members within USA Hockey were female, making it "the only national governing body among American Winter Olympic sports with a

⁷⁵ Blinn, Michael. "U.S. Women's Hockey Team Moving Ahead with Eye on Future." *Sports Illustrated*. March 30, 2017. Accessed December 2018. <https://www.si.com/nhl/2017/03/30/us-womens-hockey-team-usa-hockey-agreement>.

board that has less than 20 percent women.” The team is still hoping that the presence of the new Women’s High Performance Advisory Group will infiltrate more women into this voting board.⁷⁶

The article also discusses how many people in the hockey world believe that the International Ice Hockey Federation is the piece of the puzzle that should have more to say about gender equity in its sport, since the organization holds influence over every participating nation’s governing body. Therefore, it should have a larger leadership role when it comes to the subject. The Federation did very little to intervene with the dispute between USA Hockey and its women’s team, but the hope is that the IIHF will soon be willing to step in and help bring other countries up to speed with how their women’s programs should be treated. When discussing this matter, Cammi Granato stated that the action taken by the 2018 team should put pressure on the Federation to “look within and bring up the modern-day standard... If you look at that organization, there are imbalances there. If they do that and take the leadership role there, you might have other countries’ federations taking a stand as well.”⁷⁷

Players on the national teams of other countries around the world spoke out on several occasions about how the American team became a model to replicate and what they were able to achieve served as an inspiration. Janine Weber, a player on the Australian national team stated “I think it’s something we can all relate to and something we hope to accomplish one day in terms of equal support from our federations,” She also mentioned that she believed nation-wide action would bring the skill level of other countries up to speed with the United States and Canada.

⁷⁶ Berkman, Seth. "Contract Fight With U.S.A. Hockey Over, Hard Work Begins for Women’s Team." *New York Times*, April 1, 2017. Accessed December 2018.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/04/01/sports/hockey/usa-hockey-womens-team.html>.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

Even in South Korea, where women's ice hockey is less developed than in other competing countries, support and admiration for the boycott was shown. Jongah Park, a forward on the team, stated in an email "Even we have desire to fight for equal wages and gender equality. I don't know how to do that. But [we] always think of the equalities." These statements reveal the international scope of the strike's impact, and how it reached further audiences than anyone would've ever expected. The United States national team's negotiations with USA Hockey encouraged other national teams to consider their relationships with their own governing bodies and assess whether or not they were receiving respectable and equal treatment.⁷⁸ While the agreement did not solve nearly all the inequalities female hockey players face in America, it did plant a seed that exemplified how a women's team or program can create a space for themselves to be viewed and respected as athletes, and demand improvement in how they are treated.

This narrative helps refute Helen Lenskyj's belief that gender inequalities in sport are inherently tied to female sexual oppression.⁷⁹ The labor dispute between the team and USA Hockey, as well as the media coverage of the dispute, revolved around how these women were being treated and viewed as athletes, and not about oppression of their sexuality. The way the team was treated and represented prior to the strike revealed the existing gender discrimination within USA Hockey, and even male control and dominance since those in leadership positions of the governing body who are responsible for creating the team's contracts are majority male. However, nowhere during the dispute did the members of the team show sign that they were demanding a change in the way their sexual expression was being understood or represented by USA Hockey or the media, nor was any connection made between their sexual expression and

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Lenskyj, 3.

the obvious problems at hand such as their financial compensation, female youth team development, marketing and publicity, etc.

ESPN *Body Issue*

Perhaps the most notable media attention the team received following the strike, or ever in the team's history for that matter, was when ESPN: *The Magazine* featured six members of the team in its 2017 *Body Issue*. The *Issue* started in 2009 with a mission of celebrating "the incredible power of the athletic form," with each annual edition containing a portfolio of nude images of different profound athletes. It has become a trusted and powerful storytelling platform where a light is shed on athletes' strengths as well as vulnerabilities. ESPN's web page that is dedicated to the *Issue* proudly states that the franchise has:

helped change the way people think about athletic form. It's driven and shaped the conversation around what athletes look like and what it means to have a body that is perfect for your sport. It's inspired a deeper appreciation for what our bodies are capable of, the power they possess, the flaws they force us to accept, what they can overcome and where they take us.⁸⁰

With all this being said, the women's ice hockey team being asked to represent a franchise with such an empowering mission and goal implies that following the strike, the team became highly associated with similar themes of empowerment, equality, and what it means to be a world class athlete.

⁸⁰ "The Body Issue Archive." ESPN. Accessed January 2019.
http://www.espn.com/espn/feature/story/_/id/23584667/body-issue-archive#!about.

The content of this edition includes a portfolio of intense photos of the six teammates on the ice wearing nothing but their skates and holding their sticks, as well as a written question and answer section that reviews topics such as misconceptions about female hockey players, their training regimens, and of course, the boycott. The story begins with “The U.S. women’s national hockey team is no stranger to making bold statements. Six members posing nude on the ice for the 2017 *Body Issue*? Not even their bravest move this year,” referring to the strike. The article was published in July, so this was also after they defeated Canada for the gold medal in the World Championship in overtime. With victories on and off the ice, there was plenty to address from the team’s “fearless and groundbreaking year.”⁸¹

The interview went into detail about how the team works together as a unit to keep their bodies in the best ice hockey-shape possible through healthy nutrition and training. Meghan Duggan stated:

I take so much pride in my body, and I take so much pride in the bodies of my teammates. We train day in and day out to put ourselves in the position to be the best athletes we can be. We’re certainly shaping our body in a certain way, but at the same time, it’s propelling us through our sport.

Training wise, the group of 23 players holds each other accountable when things aren’t where they need to be. They explain that they have all bought into a culture requires a mental and physical grind out of everyone. They explained how their mindset is focused on winning a gold medal at the PyeongChang Games, “and there’s nothing that can stand in the way of that,”

⁸¹ Ain, "U.S. Women's Hockey Team..."

Duggan added. “That means people’s egos have to be pushed aside. No one cares how many minutes you played in the gold medal game if you didn’t win.”⁸²

When responding to their interviewer’s question about the biggest misconception people have about female hockey players, many of the teammate’s responses had to do with body image and assumed masculinities and femininities. “From a muscular standpoint, we’re strong women. We have big legs and big butts. It’s all about acceleration, explosion, power. We’re not size 0s, but we’re proud of our greatest assets... We want to be fast. We want to be strong,” stated Duggan. Monique Lamoureux-Morando, Jocelyne Lamoureux-Davidson’s twin sister, added:

You run into people at the airport who ask what sport you play, and they’re like, ‘Oh, I thought you’d be bigger.’ Or ‘You look really petite, and you have all your teeth.’ We’re normal women. We like to be feminine. We love to get dressed up and be pretty. But we love to train and be strong and aggressive. There’s this misconception that, if we play ice hockey, we’re a certain way off the ice.⁸³

These firsthand accounts from the players acknowledge that the assumed masculinities surrounding the sport of ice hockey that were so prevalent in media sources published during the time of the 1998 Olympics do still exist in society today. However, the players’ accounts are referring to attitudes they have experienced through in-person interactions, rather than what they have seen or read through mass media. The underlying shock factor or subliminally condescending tones about women playing ice hockey that were often presented by the authors of 1998 sources has seemed to somewhat dissipate. The ESPN *Body Issue* itself is a prime

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid.

example of how the attitudes portrayed in media sources surrounding female ice hockey players have indeed shifted between 1998 and 2017.

Being featured on such credible sports platform as ESPN's *Body Issue* allowed the teammates to publicly and proudly refute such misconceptions about themselves and their sport, as well as express how much effort they put into maintaining their toned and athletic builds that allow them to compete at the highest level of women's hockey, as displayed in the photos. This photo shoot also gives younger female athletes something to look at in the media that demonstrates the beauty in strength and athleticism. The ESPN *Body Issue*'s goal of embracing athletic bodies is what makes it stand out among other revealing female photoshoots, such as top competitor *Sports Illustrated*'s Swimsuit edition. Its goal is not to conform the bodies of its selected athletes to what society has decided to be the body type that is typically featured in magazine photoshoots, or present the women in a sexual or vulnerable way. With that being said, photoshop or other editing tools were not used the way they are often used for photoshoots of female athlete where the definition of their muscles is purposely lessened. Instead, they are portrayed in a more realistic nature with their strength being accepted and embraced rather than hidden or shamed.

However, there have been some criticisms of the *Issue* and its mission since its debut a decade ago. A *Huffington Post* article, for example, was published soon after the women's hockey team's edition reached the public, in which the author made the claim that ESPN's *Body Issue* "normalizes sexual objectification." It is argued that the same inspirational message and the impressive physiques of athletes could still be portrayed if the athletes were clothed, but that ESPN knows far too well that "sex sells." The hockey team's photoshoot is specifically referenced in the article, with the author stating:

One photoshoot includes six female hockey players who huddle together in a photograph similar to a Victoria's Secret advertisement minus the lingerie. Many who click on the *Body Issue* are not interested in further understanding the athletes' physical skills; they are more interested in seeing them naked.⁸⁴

The question at hand is whether the nudity is really being used to represent empowerment and athletic prowess, or if this message just a disguise used to get away with sexualizing athletes, specifically women.

There is a lot to be said about the number of athletes who have accepted the often awkward challenge of posing nude for the whole world to see, and the large followings and credibility many of the *Issue*'s featured athletes carry. Aside from the women's national hockey team, some of the most well-known athletes to participate include tennis stars sisters Serena and Venus Williams, Olympic swimmer Michael Phelps, Rob Gronkowski of the New England Patriots, among others. The athletes featured also come from an incredibly wide range of sports, from sumo wrestling to fencing to football, which means a wide variety of body types are being featured.⁸⁵ If all of these athletes are willing to affiliate themselves with and represent the *Body Issue*, one can assume that their views towards the segment are supportive and their values align with the uplifting message that ESPN claims they are trying to promote with the *Issue*. While there may be critics who assume the *Body Issue* is just another example of a powerful media source sexualizing public figures to make money, it cannot be denied that it reaches a huge audience that is interested in the stories these athletes have to share, and what they have to say

⁸⁴ Halverson, Haley. "The ESPN Body Issue Normalizes Sexual Objectification." HuffPost. July 11, 2017. Accessed January 2019. https://www.huffpost.com/entry/the-espn-body-issue-and-the-illusion-of-nudity-based_b_595fa8ade4b08f5c97d06902.

⁸⁵ "The Body Issue Archive."

about body image in relation to their sport. ESPN is only the platform, and it is the athletes who are really in control of the content put forth by the *Body Issue*, which for the most part does include narratives that people find powerful and motivational, such as the story of the women's hockey team's strike.

Regardless of ESPN's motive in creating the *Body Issue* or its moral standing, the fact that the women's hockey team was featured on it received just as much, if not more, media attention as the strike itself. Once the *Body Issue* was released, there was a noticeable shift in the media from discussing the outcome of the strike and what that stood for, to discussing how the team posed nude for ESPN. This subtly portrays society's persisting concentration and infatuation on the female body over female athleticism.

In the span of less than a month, the United States women's national hockey team was able to accomplish their long-term goal of formally gaining equitable treatment from their governing body, as well as defeat the Canadians for their eighth gold medal at the World Championships. Before the hype of these events were able to die down, the team had already jumped into the initial stages of training for the upcoming Olympic Games in PyeongChang. At this point, the question was whether the team would be able to continue its streak of success and tally another on ice victory for the year, and how their accomplishments of reaching a deal with USA Hockey and the World Championship would affect their next move. From a media standpoint, one would ask how the team's participation in the Olympics will be reported, and what topics will now be the focus of public discussion. Being the 20th anniversary of the sports' Olympic debut, how will the narratives surrounding the team and the tournament appear to have changed over this time period, specifically regarding societal norms of masculinities and femininities? What sort of progress can be seen, and what areas remain unresolved or ignored?

Chapter Three: PyeongChang 2018: Reclaiming Gold

The women's ice hockey championship game between long-time rivals Canada and the United States was one of the most exciting and talked about events of the 2018 Olympics. 3.7 million viewers worldwide watched as the two teams remained tied 2-2 at the end of regulation time. The game went into a 20 minute overtime and neither team was able to score. After 80 exhausting minutes of play, a shootout, the ultimate test of a team's ability to execute, goaltend, and handle the pressure when it mattered most, determined the fate of each team. It was not until the sixth round of the shootout when American forward Jocelyne Lamoureux-Davidson pulled off a perfect deke, scored, and put the United States in position to win if their goalie made the next save. A 20-year-old Maddie Rooney stopped the shot and secured for the American team what NBC's *Today* show referred to as the women's own "Miracle on Ice."⁸⁶

"We had it," team captain and veteran Meghan Duggan confidently stated during the team's post victory *Today* show appearance. "I looked up at the Jumbotron [before the shootout], Maddie was smiling, and we're like, 'Alright, our goalie's good.' We knew we had it within us, and we were ready to go. I knew it was ours." As the medal ceremony began, the announcer revealed that the victory marked the 38th anniversary to the day of the original "Miracle on Ice," when the United States men's ice hockey team triumphed over Russia in the 1980 Olympics in Lake Placid. More importantly, this win gave the women's team their first gold medal since the Nagano games two decades before. They had earned four silver medals and one bronze during the four tournaments in between. Angela Ruggiero, a star on the 1998 team, placed the medals on each of the 2018 team members' necks during the post-game ceremony, symbolizing the

⁸⁶ Stump, Scott. "U.S. Women's Hockey Team Talks Stunning 'Miracle on Ice' Win over Canada." TODAY. February 22, 2018. Accessed February 2019. <https://www.today.com/news/u-s-women-s-hockey-team-talks-about-their-own-t123710>.

strong influence her generation of women's ice hockey players had on the 2018 endeavor. "You have Angela Ruggiero giving us our gold medals, and how it all just came full circle 20 years later, I don't think it's a coincidence," Monique Lamoureux-Morando told the *Today* show.⁸⁷

Lamoureux-Morando here suggested a clear link between the women's hockey experiences in 1998 and 2018; there is good reason, though, to question this vision and linear progress. With winning a gold medal comes a great surge of public attention, circulation of discussion, and earned credibility, which was especially important for a growing sport like women's ice hockey. In the recent history of U.S. women's ice hockey, the two moments where the sport has been under this spotlight include the inaugural Olympic tournament in 1998 and the one in 2018. With this being said, the strike prior to the 2017 World Championship is too often ignored in the media's discussion of *how* the team was able to capture their second gold medal. Yet the strike and the victory in the Olympics must be looked at as one continuous moment because without the women's fight for equity, especially media equity, the aftermath of the gold medal would not have been as powerful. While many media sources discussing the gold medal do reference the strike at some point in their narrative, they often fail to address the crucial role that the team's labor dispute played in the glorified attention the team received during and after the Olympics. The media was the driving force behind the explosion of visibility of the team during each of these moments, and is also a vital part in what makes a gold medal so powerful and desirable for a team trying to make a difference in their sport. However, they were not just given the attention, they fought for it and earned it long before they received the gold medal.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

Media in a Changing World

Just like in 1998, media narratives of 2018 continued to play a significant role in creating and reinforcing social constructions and gender roles for athletes. 20 years since the debut of women's Olympic hockey, the depictions of Olympians put forth by the media still powerfully influence the public's thinking of how they are supposed to look, behave, or dress, as well as who should be competing in certain events based upon gender, age, and ethnicity. The first difference between then and 2018 is how the definition of media has changed, and how that affects the information and stereotypes people are retaining, as well as how media sources should be interpreted and analyzed. Surrounding the Nagano games, the sources that exhibited these portrayals, both visual and written, were primarily print news sources, magazines, some online website articles (as the internet was getting its start), and few sports broadcasting networks. Today, the platforms that qualify as media have broadened tremendously, with each of those platforms from before existing, alongside the addition of many more. The creation and popularity of many social media outlets, more television networks devoted to sports and the Olympics (when they're in session), and thousands of online websites and forums have opened the definition of media.

The first main effect of these newer media platforms includes the formation of a more intimate media experience where common people are no longer only reading and analyzing media, but also contributing to it. Social media allows anyone to comment or become connected to posts on the Instagram, Facebook, or Twitter accounts belonging to Olympians, the United States Olympic Committee, national governing bodies, sports organizations, etc. This expands the array of perspectives being shared beyond the person making the post or writing the original article. The second effect of the expansion of media is the start of rapid, wildfire-like circulation

of information and ideas. Today, people are able to share articles, stories, photos, videos, etc. in a matter of seconds for nearly the entire world to see, given that 56.1% of people in the world have internet access. Writers, editors, sports commentators, broadcasters, or advertisers are no longer the only ones in control of the content being produced, or where or how fast it is circulating, and it is important to consider how these two effects now contribute to the formation of today's common narratives or reoccurring themes surrounding women in sports.

From a quantitative standpoint, there is a greater amount of media coverage focused on the 2018 tournament, including stories about individual players, the teams' pre-Olympics training processes and tournaments, the statistics of the games themselves, and sponsorship or endorsement opportunities, than there was surrounding the 1998 tournament. This is an effect of both the explosion of media and the fact that more of these current materials are preserved on the internet today than they were in the past. With the higher number of women playing ice hockey today as well as the more developed fan base for the sport, there is also an increased value for media sources to produce content on the topic of the sport and its players. When considering the amount of coverage on women's ice hockey, it is also important to consider the information that is *not* presented by the media, the discussions that maybe should be included. Are writers or producers intentionally leaving out or avoiding certain stories, events, obvious facts, or controversial topics that they do not want associated with a team's public image? Why are certain components of the sport or the team constantly repeated, while other pieces are ignored? What is missing can be just as telling as what is included.

Media Narrative: 1998 Inspires 2018 Success

While quantitative information is crucial to understanding the 1998/2018 comparison, it is the qualitative nature of such media that shaped the story of how the players and the sport are perceived in society today. Again, these qualitative aspects include the rhetoric of written media, diction, underlying tones in language, visual imagery, individual or team sponsorships and endorsements with certain brands, how players are featured in advertisements, etc. The questions that must be asked when analyzing these components of media today are consistent with the questions asked about media from 1998, such as which sources are discussing women's ice hockey, what is the target audience of those sources, how are masculinities or femininities either made clear or hidden by media coverage, which brands are offering the players endorsement deals or sponsorship, and what messages are these brands revealing with their advertisements. The differences in the answers to these questions from 1998 versus 2018 reflects how the media's framing of women's ice hockey and female athletes has changed; while similar answers suggest the factors that have remained the same.

Many media sources as well as members of the team, as Lamoureux-Morando suggested with her earlier quote, began drawing parallels between the 1998 team and their 2018 successors. This parallel became a common theme through much of the discussion of the women's ice hockey during the 2018 Olympics. Many sources noted that aside from the fact that these two groups both ultimately won gold, they also both carried a heavy mission of advancing their sport and female empowerment. Both teams' motivation to win gold stemmed from their desire to reach a platform where they would be able to promote this mission, and they knew the media attention and recognition they would receive from winning the gold medal would create a platform to do so. Since they had just come up with an agreement with USA Hockey several

months prior that ensured an increased amount of media coverage of the team, the addition of a gold medal would inevitably spike the attention even more. The popularity of women's ice hockey did explode for the first time after the Nagano victory, thanks to the heightened nationwide media attention and recognition towards the team and the sport, and now after the win in 2018, the team is hoping to trigger the same sort of affect this time around.

Just days before the 2018 team ended the program's gold medal drought, USA Hockey published an article that emphasized the ties between the two teams and how the victory at Nagano shaped the players competing in PyeongChang. While "Miracle on Ice" is said to have inspired what would become known as the "greatest generation" of NHL players, the author explained, the 1998 gold medal team inspired the women's game the same way by influencing the greatest American players of today like Meghan Duggan and Hilary Knight. Duggan was 10 years old when she watched the '98 team capture the gold medal on television, dreaming she too would one day be wearing a USA jersey on the Olympic stage. "When I think back to watching the 1998 team, it changed my life. It changed the path I chose, the schools I attended and the cities I lived in. It's why I'm standing where I am today," she told USA Hockey. Many members of the 1998 team have continued to contribute to the women's game, whether through coaching at top Division I universities, organizing youth programs, or encouraging their own children to play. According to the article, "Even 20 years later, most of these women look like they could still lace up the skates and compete for Olympic gold. Instead they are happy to look ahead in hopes that this year's team can take the sport to even greater heights." When Sue Merz, a 1998 gold medalist, discussed what she foresaw for the 2018 team, she said "I know we made an impression on these women and because it's so much bigger now than it was even 20 years ago. These women are going to have an even bigger impression on the next generation of girls'

hockey, and sports in general.”⁸⁸ It is not surprising that this article, published by USA Hockey, does not include discussion of the strike and how it was able to influence the success of the team in their Olympic run, or how the strike served as a catalyst for the growth of women’s equity in sports. The strike resulted from a dispute between the national team and USA Hockey, and the public attention provided USA Hockey a poor reputation for a period of time. With this being said, it is no wonder that USA Hockey solely focused on how the 1998 team influenced the 2018 team’s journey to winning a gold medal, and intentionally avoided acknowledging that the strike did indeed set the team up for success in the Olympics.

In September 2017, several members of the team attended the Team USA Media Summit, a four day long event that provides media with access to America’s top Olympic hopefuls leading into the games. During the press conference, the players were asked questions by their own public relations head, as well as many media outlets from *Marie Claire* to the *Wall Street Journal*. Here, Meghan Duggan and Hilary Knight were both asked to make statements regarding comparisons between the motives of their own team and those of the 1998 team. In response to a question about how the 1998 team inspired her, Duggan stated:

When I think about that time [in 1998] and what they stood for and what they accomplished, there’s a lot of parallels between that team and the group we have right now and the culture we have in our locker room. That was a powerful group of women that did something amazing by sticking together and putting their minds to bringing home a gold medal. We’ve taken advice from some of the greats like Cammi Granato and how they were able to capture that gold medal. To me, this is the group that’s going to do what that group did 20 years ago. I’m excited to show the world what we have.

⁸⁸ Thompson, "Time to Shine."

In response to what winning gold would mean for the future of women's hockey, Knight added:

It's been 20 years since birth of women's hockey on the Olympic stage and 20 years since we've won a gold medal. As Meghan said this team is so ripe. Winning a gold medal would mean everything to not only us, but also to the team behind the team. It's also going to ignite registration numbers. Meg and I remember in 1998 when those women brought home the gold medal and how ecstatic the United States was and how women's ice hockey took off for a little bit there. If we can bring home the gold and continue to develop the grassroots program, we'll succeed."⁸⁹

During this event, the *Wall Street Journal* did ask a question connecting the team's successful labor dispute with their approach to the Olympics, to which the players and team's general manager offered responses that did credit the strike with their success thus far. The reporter questioned "Is there anymore talk about possibly skipping the World Championship last year or is that completely behind you, and what effect has that experience had on you as a group of players?" The team's manager explained that the support they received as a result of the agreement has given the team the resources they need to properly prepare for their mission to win gold. Meghan Duggan commented:

The strike raised visibility of our sport. It was a historic moment that changed the future of women's hockey and sports in the country. We will be taking advantage of some of the things we talked about in the agreement, in terms of marketing, public relations, promoting our team and women's hockey, and getting seats filled and things like that.⁹⁰

⁸⁹ "2017 Team USA Media Summit." Interview by Reagan Carey. Team USA. September 26, 2018. Accessed February 2019. <https://www.teamusa.org/Media/Games/PyeongChang-2018/Media-Summit/Video>.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

From the team's perspective, their actions surrounding the 2017 World Championship paved their way to where they needed to be to have success in the Olympics.

This press conference is an example of how the process of analyzing media has changed over the past two decades ago. The entire conference was videotaped and is available to the public online, which adds a visual component to the media experience. If the same sort of press conference was held with Olympic athletes in 1998, the only way people would've been able to access or gain insight to the discussion was through whatever information reporters included in their magazines or newspapers. Visual media today allow viewers to see first-hand how athletes "perform" gender, or how certain settings force or restrict gender norms. When watching the Media Summit, gender seems to be taken out of the equation, or at least it is not the focus of the discussion or the players' appearances. The six team members present are all matching in relatively gender-neutral outfits, wearing Olympics branded sweatshirts, black athletic leggings or jeans, and sneakers. There is nothing about their appearances are overtly feminine, and most of the questions asked are having to do with the skill and readiness of the team for the Olympics. This stands in stark contrast to media coverage 20 years before that focused on the teams' mere existence as female athletes, and often forced feminine stereotypes into the discussion to "balance out" the idea of women playing a sport that was thought of as masculine.

By intentionally including player's direct statements, opinions, and insight, those producing media content were able to trigger a more empathetic connection between their audience and the players. Looking at what the players have to say about the significance of a gold medal for movement towards equal treatment is also just as important. The players, after all, are the ones living through the development of the sport and seeing transformations first hand. Layered stories that include the firsthand accounts from players as well as the voices of popular

media platforms, especially ones such as this dealing with a topic within the realm of social equality, are what sells and what receives a lot of buzz in the society today.

The media's goal in establishing the parallel between the 1998 and 2018 team was to create a full-circle, heartwarming story that readers and viewers would feel inclined to follow about women helping women. Relating the two teams, while framing the 2018 piece as a sequel to the 1998 event, creates a quintessential Olympic success story of a team succeeding on its 20th anniversary of its Olympic debut and last gold medal. Emphasizing that both teams were on the same mission of advancing their sport and female athletes through the achievement of a gold medal also gives a deeper meaning to the story, and the media is well aware that American people like to believe a team is "fighting for something," rather than just playing the sport and scoring goals for fun. The grunt work the team put into this "fight" through their labor dispute was a less emphasized part of the media narrative. This is because it is can be viewed as controversial, political, and a "sticky" situation that does not fit in with the "full circle, success story" narrative. In reality, while the team may have been inspired by 1998 team, the strike is what paved the way for the success the team had at the 2018 Olympics, and everything that followed the victory.

"Internal" media sources, or platforms that are directly associated with the Olympic team, such as the USA Hockey or Team USA websites, have used several other tactics aside from the 1998-2018 parallel story to get American's to buy into the women's team. The additional goals of these internal sources include creating a solid fan base of spectators, while simultaneously aligning themselves with likeable and progressive goals geared towards the advancement of women in sports. One of the alternative themes incorporated into these articles in order to "sell" the women's team was the personalization of the players. Starting in the spring of 2017, right

after the conclusion of the boycott and World Championship tournament, USA Hockey began publishing frequent newsletters and stories on their website devoted to the women's national team. The earlier articles include updates about the Olympic roster as cuts or additions were being made, scores and coverage from games a part of the pre-Olympic tour, and player introductions, all in attempt to build up positive and exciting publicity surrounding the team as the Games neared closer. USA Hockey's motivation to up their posting about the women's team stemmed from needing to fulfil the part of the strike-ending agreement with the team that demanded greater media attention and renown towards the sport. Publishing these articles served as a way to market the women's team to the hockey world as *the* team to follow throughout the Olympics, a result the team members themselves had been hoping would come out of their victorious labor dispute. When looking at USA Hockey's news section devoted to the men's team during the Olympic period, the frequency of articles and features published appear to be consistent with that of the women's section, a sign that the governing body began paying close attention to the balance of media coverage between the two teams.

The writers of these articles repeatedly personalized the players by discussing their backgrounds, interests, and goals for the Games. This tactic put faces and personalities to the names on the roster, encouraging audiences to further resonate with the players and feel more of an affinity with the team and its success. For example, from the moment the team arrived at the Gangneung Olympic Village on February 2nd until the Games wrapped up at the end of the month, USA Hockey began publishing even more frequent articles about the team. These stories documented and narrated the lives of the women throughout the tournament, their reactions to being a part of the Olympic experience, their progress through each practice and game, etc. A "Get to Know" segment was published on the website that highlighted a different member of the

team each day, including their favorite hockey memories, fun facts, their inspirations, and other general biographical information.⁹¹ Another article was posted that served as a “daily notebook” for the team’s first five days overseas, including highlights from each day, quotes from players, photos, and how the team was spending their free off-ice time.⁹²

Aside from personalizing the players, the recurring themes of these USA Hockey articles included hyping up the United States and Canada rivalry, and recalling the Americans’ upset at the 2014 Games in Sochi. The team’s contagious excitement and Olympic spirit was epitomized in an article titled “Team Effort,” which described the team’s participation in and impression of the eminent Olympics opening ceremony. The team was among the United States contingent proudly walking behind the red, white, and blue flags and Olympic flames through the stadium. As the author of the article, Harry Thompson, describes, the ceremony serves as the common “aha moment” for Olympic athletes, or when it really hits them for the first time that they are a part of something so much greater than themselves. Hilary Knight, whose first time marching in the ceremony was at the 2010 Vancouver games, is quoted stating:

Everyone is ecstatic. That’s all anyone has been talking about. It’s a great way to kick off the tournament, walking in with fellow athletes. For me, personally, when I look back on that moment in Vancouver that’s when it really sunk in that ‘oh my gosh, I’m a member of Team USA and I’m at the Olympics.’

Not all teams march at the ceremony, depending on the scheduling of their upcoming events. In 2014, the women’s team chose not to march to due having their first game less than 24 hours

⁹¹ "Get to Know: Women's Olympic Team." USA Hockey. February 08, 2018. Accessed February 2019. https://teamusa.usahockey.com/news_article/show/879351.

⁹² "2018 Olympic Winter Games Daily Notebook: Days 1-5." USA Hockey. January 29, 2018. Accessed February 2019. https://teamusa.usahockey.com/news_article/show/882553.

after the ceremony, and needed time to rest and prepare. In 2018, though, both the men's and women's ice hockey teams marched together for the first time, symbolizing a unification of the sport, without any gender-based division. Although not publicly noted, this unification is another effect of women's team's strike for gender equity. The article mentions how Kacey Bellamy of the women's team and Bobby Butler of the men's team were able to reconnect at the ceremony after graduating from the University of New Hampshire together in 2009. "We kind of lost touch but I've definitely followed her career. She's done great things for USA Hockey," stated Butler.⁹³

In several other USA Hockey articles written by Harry Thompson, he recounts the team's tragic loss to Canada at Sochi, and how this had shaped the team playing in PyeongChang. At Sochi, the Americans were up 2-1 with a only minute left in the third period, and a minute away from ending their gold medal drought, when the Canadians tied it up and forced the game into overtime, where they would soon claim their victory. "The memory of that fateful February night four years ago is never far from the minds of the U.S. Women's Team. It has fueled the fire that pushes these players to do one extra rep in the gym and dig just a little bit deeper every time they step on the ice," Thompson stated in one article published on the eve of the American's first match of the 2018 tournament against Finland. He added the quote from Lee Stecklein, a member of the 2014 and 2018 teams, "I know that for each player on that team it's a loss that they'll never forget. Nothing can take that away, but we want to do everything in our power so that we never have to feel that again." Of course, the memory of this loss to Canada, as well as the losses to them at Salt Lake City and Vancouver, urged many to presumptuously look on to

⁹³ Thompson, Harry. "Team Effort." Team USA Hockey. February 09, 2018. Accessed February 2019. https://teamusa.usahockey.com/news_article/show/885129.

yet another United States versus Canada gold medal matchup, even before the preliminary games were played. The American team and coaching staff, however, refused to look beyond the game they had right in front of them.⁹⁴

By publishing stories like these, USA Hockey or the United States Olympic Committee intends to paint a positive and encouraging picture of the women's team for the public to see, which also transfers over to how the public views USA Hockey's own image as an organization. Another goal of this organization is to do what it can to comply with the demands of the agreement it came to with the women's team. With these goals in mind, it would be very unlikely for them to promote or discuss anything relating to the team that could be spun negatively or spark controversy. That is where external sources, ones that do not have any affiliation with the women's team or the Olympics and have no ulterior motive of needing to frame the team in a certain way, come into play. These sources offer material that can be more deeply read into when trying to understand how society's perception of female athletes is shaped by the media.

Media Narrative: A New Focus on Success, Not Gender

When looking at content published by these external sources, there is a common thread of discussion that seems to place a newfound seriousness and respect on the success of the American women's team. This success is especially emphasized in comparison to the success, or lack thereof, of the other American athletes competing in PyeongChang. Prior to the women's ice hockey gold medal matchup, *Time* magazine published an article titled "USA Women's

⁹⁴ Thompson, Harry. "A New Day." Team USA Hockey. February 10, 2018. Accessed February 2019. https://teamusa.usahockey.com/news_article/show/885436.

Hockey Team Is Now the Great American Olympic Hope,” praising the team and its talent for developing an exploding fan base. “The U.S. women’s hockey team is here to save us,” the author stated as he discussed the disappointing lack of medals collected thus far in the Games by Team USA. After 10 days in PyeongChang, the United States had earned a total of only 10 medals, falling far behind the leading country Norway who at that point already had 26, despite the United States sending their largest Winter Olympic team in history to South Korea. Reassuring his readers, the author stated “But don’t panic quite yet. While the American women’s hockey team won’t make up the medal difference singlehanded, its pursuit of a first hockey gold in two decades is something worth cheering for.” The author described some of the other events where Americans still may have been able to claim a medal, but encouraged people to focus their main attention and hope on the women’s ice hockey team as they geared up to face Canada for the gold medal. “Still, a women’s hockey gold medal would just feel better than others... A hockey win over a tough opponent adds an extra sweetener. We celebrate rivalry victories in hockey like no other,” the author added. After this statement, it is made clear that he was referencing the women’s team and not the men’s team, by mentioning the latter in a very pessimistic way that aimed to almost deter people from tuning into their upcoming games.⁹⁵ The lack of interest towards the men’s tournament in general throughout the PyeongChang Games is also attributable to the fact that for the first time since 1998, the NHL did not allow any of its players to compete in the Olympics. While the men’s teams from each country were missing its true best players and the most recognizable names in men’s hockey, the women’s teams still featured the world’s best talent. The NHL had sent its players to the Olympics since 1998, so

⁹⁵ Gregory, Sean. "USA Women's Hockey Team Is Now the Great American Olympic Hope." *Time*, February 19, 2018.

2018 was the first time since women's ice hockey became an Olympic event where it was not competing for media attention with the big names of the NHL players.⁹⁶

Time has one of the world's largest circulations for a weekly news magazine, and for one of its writers to put forward a message basically saying "Forget about the other events of this year's Olympics, women's ice hockey is the one to watch so hop on the bandwagon now," should not be overlooked. Not only is it encouraging focus on a female sport, but on women's ice hockey of all things, when only 20 years ago a majority of the country wasn't in tune to the fact that women played the sport at all. *Time* also does not target one gender specifically, nor is it a sports specific magazine, given the array of topics it covers from politics to entertainment. Therefore, it is reaching an across-the-board audience, one that includes people who aren't necessarily more prone to already be watching women's ice hockey in the Olympics. The most crucial point of the article is the author's message that the team deserves attention not because they are women, but because they are a successful team. This contrasts to a lot of the messages put forth by media in 1998. At that point, Olympic women's ice hockey's "claim to fame" in the media was, for the most part, because they were women, and were competing in a sport where women had never before competed on the Olympic platform. Now, we are seeing gender being removed from the main draw for attention, with talent and success taking its place.

The day after women's team's victory, the *Wall Street Journal* also published an article about how this gold medal significantly helped Team USA as a whole in its effort to push up the medal standings after "several favorites [in other events] failed to deliver." After the women's

⁹⁶ Caldwell, Dave. "Can Anyone Topple the Women's Hockey Juggernauts? the U.S. and Canada Exert a Rare Level of Dominance, but Observers See Signs of Parity on the Horizon." *Wall Street Journal (Online)*, Feb 07, 2018. <https://search.proquest.com/docview/1995859216?accountid=14405>.

ice hockey gold medal match-up, which the article referred to as the climax of the Games, the U.S. reached a “medal total of 21-- good enough for fourth place but still well behind leader Norway’s 35 medals.”⁹⁷ Like *Time*, the *Wall Street Journal* does not have a narrow audience of readers because it touches upon so many areas of culture. For such a source to be focusing on women’s ice hockey as the main attraction of the Olympic games goes a long way in shaping public focus and ideas of female athletes. The article does include a quote from U.S. defenseman Sidney Morin from the post game medal ceremony stating “This is our Stanley Cup. This is our Super Bowl. To reach the pinnacle here is unbelievable.”⁹⁸ Here, comparisons to the achievements of the men’s game as the “golden standard” resurfaces. This statement acknowledges the lack of “peaks” in level of achievement or competition for women in sports to strive to reach, in comparison to men. Even today, the Olympics remain as one of the only highly anticipated and heavily watched platforms showcasing women’s sports. While women of most sports have been able to excel within the Olympics platform over recent decades, the opportunities for female athletes to compete professionally on a grand scale comparable to the Stanley Cup or Super Bowl, for example, is still non-existent.

The *Globe and Mail*, one of Canada’s top newspapers, published a loaded article at the end of the tournament that also touched upon the growing emphasis and seriousness being placed on the event of women’s ice hockey in the Olympics. The author credits this growing emphasis to the interest surrounding the intense rivalry between the United States and Canada, as well as how fast the game is growing internationally. It is explained that the Canadian public has now

⁹⁷ Chairusmi, Jim, Rachel Bachman, and Jonathan Cheng. "Pyeongchang 2018 -- Ice Hockey: Team USA Finds Golden Redemption --- U.S. Women's Hockey Team Leads American Push Up the Medal Standings." *Wall Street Journal*, Feb 23, 2018, Eastern edition. <https://search.proquest.com/docview/2007420413?accountid=14405>.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

noticed the heightened level of talent and skill in their women's team, which has shifted the national attention away from other Olympic events and towards women's ice hockey. "Every other sport is a talent crapshoot. Except women's hockey," the author states. When praising the competitive edge of the American and Canadian powerhouses, the author stated "No rivalry in sports pays off in entertainment/cardiac-distress more reliably than this one... The rivalry is now the defining feature of our international hockey imagination." The significance and draw of public interest of the rivalry is its predictability, since people can expect a very close and passionate game whenever these two teams match-up, especially when fighting for an Olympic gold medal. No other sport, men's or women's, has that sort of guarantee.⁹⁹

The 2018 tournament can be looked at as a "small watershed" for women's hockey on an international level as well, as improvements for the competing teams other than the United States and Canada were evident in regard to skill level as well as the attention their games received. In order to further expand the talent of the top two teams into the second tier of teams, more people must be encouraged "to take it seriously. And the only way to get them to take it seriously is dangle the opportunity to do it in the Olympics." However, the United States and Canada are still the only two countries willing to pay female hockey players, which poses huge limitations for other countries to catch up. While the 2018 tournament was still in progress, the International Ice Hockey Federation announced it would be expanding the number of teams to compete in the 2022 Olympic tournament up to ten. In the midst of this decision, Rene Fasel, president of the IIHF, received some backlash after claiming that the women's game was moving toward parity

⁹⁹ Kelly, Cathal. "USA Tops Canada in Shootout to Win Olympic Gold in Women's Hockey for First Time since 1998." *The Globe and Mail*, February 21, 2018. Accessed March 2019. <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/sports/olympics/2018-pyeongchang-winter-olympics-womens-ice-hockey-canada-usa-gold-medal-shootout-win/article38060412/>.

more quickly than it took the men's, using statistics from the 1930s as comparative evidence. The author of the *Globe and Mail* article critically responded to Fasel's comment by stating "In 1930, hockey players tied their skates to their street shoes, played with a tree branch and smoked two packs a day. I'm not sure the analogy fits."¹⁰⁰ The president's statement offers another example that epitomizes the western liberal feminist approach that treats the bar set by men as the "yardstick" to measure the growth of women's sports. Obviously, Fasel's intention when making this comparison was a positive one, hoping to shed some light on the momentum of women's ice hockey. However, trying to create a parallel between movements almost a century apart from one another does not offer much relevance, can be interpreted as subliminally condescending, and is evident of the inherently patriarchal society we're in.

The differences between the actual games of women's hockey and men's hockey, and how these differences affect the spectator experience, is another topic of popular discussion that has continued to present itself in the media over the past two decades. Women's hockey does not allow body checking, which is often the main criteria of differential between the two games that people comment on, but there are other noticeable differences that stem from that. The absence of body checking opens up the play on the ice, allowing for more time and space for women to incorporate creativity and offensive risk into their shifts. The men's game is more revolved around strategic "systems," rather than spontaneous improvisation, and puts a greater emphasis on solid defense than offense. The way in which writers craft their rhetoric when describing the less physical tendencies of women's hockey provides insight to how gender behavioral norms affect how one thinks a certain gender should perform a sport.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

On the one hand, there is a growing number of fans who are excited by the creativity of the women's game, and who are often in awe of the precise skill and flow it possesses. The *Los Angeles Times* published a piece in February 2018 that showed this sort of appreciation for the women's sport. The author, a male hockey player himself, explained his amazement when he watched a women's college hockey game for the first time. When contrasting the male versus female style of play, he stated "The men's game can be depressing, like hockey has morphed into a totalitarian state." When describing the women's game, however, he explained:

But the women's game? You know that feeling when you're sick and you can't get out of bed, and then that first day comes when you're back outside and you tell yourself not to overdo it, but before you know it, you're racing around and you never want to go back in again? That's the women's game.¹⁰¹

Two very different images and tones are offered by these two analogies. He credits the creativity and impulse exhibited by the women's play to the likelihood that most of them grew up playing on boys' teams. "[Many] might have been the only girl on the team. If you're going to be the only anything in anything, you probably don't scare easily... You have pluck, and with pluck comes a zest for creativity." The author is commenting on the noble or bold qualities a young girl would need to possess to be willing to stand out as the only female on a team or in a game. A critic might say that the statement has an underlying hegemonic tone that suggests that these women are only as talented as they are because of their exposure to playing with boys when they were younger. Regardless, by using words like "brave," "guts," "freedom," "dazzlement," and "pluck" in this article to describe the way women play hockey, the author frames the sport in

¹⁰¹ Fleming, Colin. "If You're Not Watching Women's Hockey, You're Missing out." *Los Angeles Times*, February 12, 2018. Accessed March 2019. <https://www.latimes.com/opinion/op-ed/la-oe-fleming-women-hockey-olympics-20180212-story.html>.

probably the most progressive and supportive context one would be able to find in today's media.¹⁰²

On the other side of things, there still remains the idea that the lack of body contact in women's hockey makes it inferior to men's hockey in the eyes of audiences. During the Games at Sochi in 2014, the *Wall Street Journal* published an article that offered perspectives from both sides of the debate. "The women play a daintier game of hockey than their male counterparts... Some fans gripe that the women's game would be more exciting if they were allowed to flatten each other on the open ice," the author stated when explaining what the women's style of play might be missing out on by outlawing body checking.¹⁰³ Using the word "dainty" to describe the women's game definitely reveals a misconception of the game, given that anyone who watches a women's hockey game at any level could see that it is still a very physical game, just without body-to-body impact being a main focus. "Dainty" is a word aligned with stereotypical femininity, interchangeable with other similar adjectives such as delicate, that take away from the idea that strength and power are in fact prominent components of the women's game.

Celebration Media Tour and Sponsorships

Outside of traditional written media sources, the team made many media appearances on television and at different popular events once they returned to America on what many have referred to as their celebration tour. Within the first two weeks after the gold medal game, the team appeared on two of the most popular syndicated talk shows today, *The Ellen Degeneres*

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Terlep, Sharon. "(Technically) no Checking in Women's Hockey; without Checking, Women's Game is Daintier--but it Still Gets Chippy when Archrivals U.S. and Canada Meet." *Wall Street Journal (Online)*, Feb 10, 2014. <https://search.proquest.com/docview/1496781415?accountid=14405>.

Show and *The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon*, on which they discussed their excitement over the win, the strike of the World Championship, their mission to fight for equality, their appearance in ESPN Body Issue, among other topics.¹⁰⁴ On both shows, the players are wearing very similar outfits to the ones they had on at the Team USA Media Summit, with black leggings, sneakers, and their game jerseys. On *Ellen*, one of the players told the TV host “We wanted to bring a gold back for you,” to which Ellen jokingly responded “You wouldn’t be here if you hadn’t.”¹⁰⁵ Although she was joking, this comment definitely holds some truth to it, since the difference between being asked to come on the show versus not being asked was most likely determined by whether or not they won gold. While the results of the strike definitely paved the way for the team to be Olympics ready, actually winning the gold medal definitely expanded the media opportunity the team received.

Off air, the team made several appearances on major stages in the sports world including being honored at multiple NHL games across the country, an NBA game between the Washington Wizards and Toronto Raptors, and a U.S. women’s soccer game against France at the SheBelieves Cup. Several members of the team also got to meet tennis legends Serena and Venus Williams at a Madison Square Garden event. In reflection of being able to meet players on the national soccer team and the Williams sisters, Kendall Coyne told USA Hockey “It’s no secret how big women’s tennis is and how much the women’s soccer team has grown over the last 20 years. I think it’s a platform that shows what we can do and what we’re striving to

¹⁰⁴ Scifo, Dan. "U.S. Olympic Women's Team Enjoying Gold-Medal Treatment." USA Hockey. March 14, 2018. Accessed March 2019.

https://teamusa.usahockey.com/news_article/show/898194.

¹⁰⁵ "Ellen Honors the Gold Medal Winning U.S. Women's Hockey Team." In *The Ellen Show*. NBC. February 27, 2018.

become. It's exciting for us."¹⁰⁶ Professional female tennis and soccer players in particular have stood out as promoters of advancement in women's sports over the past several decades, given that they are both sports that women have been playing in large numbers for along time.

American tennis heroes like Billie Jean King, Chris Evert, and Serena Williams have all been denoted in media as symbols of breaking the gender barrier in athletics, and the United States victory at the 1999 World Cup is viewed as a defining event in the history of women's sports. An idealistic narrative in the eyes of proponents of women's ice hockey going forward is one that places women's hockey into the collection of specific sports such as tennis and soccer that have played key roles in the fight for gender equity in athletics. The team also rang the bell at the New York Stock Exchange, and were invited amongst other successful Olympians from PyeongChang to visit the White House.¹⁰⁷

The team's fight for equality between the strike and gold medal was recognized in a more tangible way when they received several awards honoring their mission and success. At ESPN's 2018 ESPY Awards, the team was presented with the award for Best Game for their gold medal performance against Canada, beating out the other nominees including the 2018 Rose Bowl game and a World Series game. They also won the Sports Humanitarian Team of the Year Award at ESPN's Sports Humanitarian Awards, an award that honors a team "a sports club/team that demonstrates how teamwork can create a measurable impact on a community or cause." The women's team was going up against widely popular professional men's teams of three different sports for this award, including the Boston Red Sox, Anaheim Ducks, and Chicago Fire. ESPN's reasoning for why the women's team deserved a nomination included "Players on the team put

¹⁰⁶ Scifo, "U.S. Women's Olympic Team..."

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

their careers, reputations and livelihoods on the line in order to fight for equitable support, and in the process, they reminded the entire nation that equality demands that women have equal standing in sports.”¹⁰⁸ Both of these honors confirmed the public’s recognition and appreciation of how much the team had accomplished between the strike and the Olympics. This recognition resulted from the common media narratives surrounding these events that influenced the public’s perception of the team and its actions.

The landscape of sponsorship and endorsement opportunities for women’s hockey players has drastically changed since 1998. Surrounding the Games at Nagano, the team’s captain, Cammi Granato, was the only player on the team who was offered multiple endorsement deals, and therefore the only one receiving the economic benefit that comes from those sorts of opportunities. The extent of visibility of the team and individual players that came from sponsorships or endorsements was also very limited back then, given the narrow array of media platforms that these partnerships could be displayed on. In contrast, many members of the 2018 team have partnered up with big brand names and have had increased economic rewards from taking advantage of the many opportunities to publicly represent those brands. Today, it is also more popular for companies to use message-heavy campaigns in their advertisements and self-branding efforts that align with popular and current trends. Brands select and sign certain athletes as partners based on the athletes’ public persona and reputation. When they’re incorporated into these advertisements or features surrounding a campaign, people then associate them with the message being promoted or the reputation of the brand itself. With this being said, sponsorships

¹⁰⁸ Michelis, Belen. "ESPN Announces 2018 Sports Humanitarian Award Nominees and Stuart Scott ENSPIRE Award Honorees." News release, June 19, 2018. ESPN Press Room. <https://espnpressroom.com/us/press-releases/2018/06/test-10/>.

and endorsements play a big role in how people understand what these athletes stand for now more than ever.

CCM Hockey, one of the sport's top equipment brands, signed seven women from the Olympic team for endorsement deals. The women are often used for the company's advertisements or promotional videos, and in return the players will often wear CCM gear for press conferences, interviews, or in photos posted on their personal social media accounts.¹⁰⁹ Meghan Duggan partnered up with the Kellogg Company as one of its "Team Kellogg" athletes for its Team USA sponsorship marketing throughout the Pyeongchang Games. The theme of their marketing campaign was labeled "What gets you started?" promoting the idea that athletes and non-athletes are one in the same in that they both rely on their morning routines, for example, eating their favorite Kellogg's cereals, to get their days started and achieve their goals. This campaign translated onto multiple media platforms through the spread of the hashtag #GetMeStarted, allowing the campaign to become more viral than if it were to just be seen on television or print.¹¹⁰ Duggan was featured in a Kellogg's commercial showing clips of her on the ice and eating Kellogg's Special K cereal as she discussed how her passion for her team and sport are what "get her started" in the mornings. Kellogg's is using a "Hey look, Olympian Meghan Duggan is just like you!" kind of strategy with this advertisement, giving viewers and fans insight into Duggan's seemingly "normal" and wholesome lifestyle. Nathan Chen, a male figure skater who competed at Pyeongchang is another Team Kellogg athlete featured in this

¹⁰⁹ "Pro Players." CCM Hockey. Accessed March 2019. <https://ccmhockey.com/en/pro-players#sm.0001g7ghng2hhe21xvd1aeq0qam47>.

¹¹⁰ Kellogg's. "Team Kellogg's™ Meghan Duggan Leads U.S. Women's Hockey to Gold at the Olympic Winter Games PyeongChang 2018." News release, February 23, 2018. Kellogg Company. <http://newsroom.kelloggcompany.com/2018-02-23-Team-Kelloggs-TM-Meghan-Duggan-Leads-U-S-Womens-Hockey-to-Gold-at-the-Olympic-Winter-Games-PyeongChang-2018>.

advertisement.¹¹¹ In regard to gender roles, it might not be the most traditional sight to see a female hockey player and male figure skater together in an advertisement, rather than the other way around, but the focus of the commercial has nothing to do with their gender and how that correlates with what sport they play, and instead focuses on their goals as athletes. Both Olympians were also featured on the covers of numerous Kellogg's cereal boxes portraying the same message. As a whole, this theme frames Duggan and Chen as inspirational figures that people can connect and relate to.

Hilary Knight has been one of Red Bull's sponsored athletes for several years now, along with many other athletes from more non-traditional extreme sports such as freestyle motocross, skateboarding, surfing, or skydiving. Red Bull stands out as a brand who puts more energy into creating original marketing content than they do selling their actual product. With this being said, the messaging and personality of Red Bull as a brand is very distinguished and familiar to many. They're all about entertaining their consumers with exciting content that many would consider, for lack of a better word, "cool," with athletes who give off this sort of badass vibe, all the while fitting under Red Bull's slogan "Red Bull gives you wings." Hilary Knight and her identity as one of the best female hockey players in the world is therefore tied to these themes as one of Red Bull's most visible and promoted athletes in their content. In regard to gender, Red Bull's theme is definitely not skewed towards femininity. Red Bull's primary target audience is 18 to 34 year old males who might find interest and align with its "living on the edge" marketing content and who are likely to drink energy drinks. In any visual content or advertisements featuring Knight, there are no signs of overt femininity being forced into her appearance or through the topics discussed when she is interviewed, as most photos of videos of her on the Red Bull website

¹¹¹ Kellogg's. "Meet Team Kellogg's 2018." Advertisement. *MultiVu*. October 30, 2017.

include her dressed in full hockey equipment on the ice. Red Bull is enforcing what Knight does, rather than who she is. The company has referred to her as “The Wayne Gretzky of women’s ice hockey,” and the “marketing face of the first ever paid women’s professional hockey league,” encouraging her talent as well as her initiative in the fight against compensation discrimination.¹¹²

Conclusion

Several themes dominate the media narratives surrounding the 2018 women’s Olympic ice hockey team. One narrative is based on the misconception that the inspiration from the 1998 team and the motivation to win gold to promote female empowerment were the direct causes for the 2018 gold medal victory. This narrative ignores the reality that the team was only as successful as they were in the Olympics because of their decision to go on strike and fight for their right to be treated as legitimate athletes. The narrative that was created put pressure on the media to personalize athletes in detail, allowing audiences to feel a more intimate connection to them and keep them coming back for more. This narrative reveals the how media shapes content based on what people are more likely to read and purchase. A theme that parallels with a lot of this discussion is the association between the American team and women’s empowerment. Between taking public action to fight for equal treatment, and winning an Olympic gold medal in the wake of that effort, media sources were given the perfect opportunity to get behind the team and use it as a modern symbol of the fight for gender equality in sports.

¹¹² Hoppes, Nate. "This Woman Is the Wayne Gretzky of Women's Hockey." Red Bull. March 02, 2016. Accessed March 2019. <https://www.redbull.com/us-en/hilary-knight-professional-hockey-player>.

The next overwhelming thread is the removal of gender from the main focus of written discussion and visual components of media, and a shift towards focusing more on the actual success of the team. In 1998, media obsessed over the fact that the entry of women's ice hockey into the Olympics solidified the idea that ice hockey was apparently no longer just a game for men. The draw in watching the women's tournament, according to the media, revolved around the intriguing thought of *women playing ice hockey*. 20 years later, the central focus of discussion in the media about the United States women's ice hockey team is no longer just zeroed in on their existence as women. In 2018, the media encouraged people to follow the team because of its talented roster and the high quality of hockey being played. It is inevitable that their gender is still a part of the discussion, especially in regard to discussion of economic opportunity and equality, but it is now a much more layered discussion that goes beyond the fact that they are females playing a very physical, fast, and traditionally male dominant sport. This shift in narrative reveals the growth of the sport and the newfound respect the team has earned itself.

Chapter Four: Gender Equality Today: Ice Hockey and Beyond

Since the gold medal victory at Pyeongchang, the United States women's national ice hockey team has not completely shied away from the spotlight. In February 2019, Kendall Coyne-Schofield, a forward on the 2018 gold medal team, became the first woman to compete in the annual NHL All-Star Skills Competition. Coyne-Schofield was invited by the NHL to compete in the Fastest Skater event at the Competition to fill the place of an NHL player who had to back out of the event due to an injury. She competed as the only female against all NHL players, and clocked an impressive time of 14.346 seconds, finishing in seventh place out of eight.¹¹³

Her appearance in the Competition made national headlines, with many media sources labeling it as a milestone change in the landscape of women's ice hockey. "It's hard to put into words, but I think what's so special about this week is how many lives were changed, how many doors were opened, how many barriers were broken and how many people were inspired to pick up the sport of ice hockey," Coyne-Schofield stated referring to her exciting series of events.¹¹⁴ While she was confident she could compete with the men, she recalls how most people were shocked at how she was able to keep up. The NHL is perhaps the most powerful platform in the professional hockey world, and there is something to be said about its decision to invite a female player to join the previously all male event. It made a public statement that suggests the organization is a strong supporter of growth of the women's game. NBC took advantage of all the buzz surrounding Coyne-Schofield's performance in the Competition by asking her to

¹¹³ Scifo, Dan. "Kendall Coyne Schofield Changes Landscape of Women's Hockey in One Week." USA Hockey. February 09, 2019. Accessed April 2019. https://teamusa.usahockey.com/news_article/show/992455.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

partake as an analyst on NBCSN's regular-season NHL broadcast of a game between the Pittsburgh Penguins and Tampa Bay Lightning.¹¹⁵ This allowed her to prove her ability to speak the game in a usually male dominated setting and express her breadth of knowledge about the sport to a wide audience, regardless of which gender is playing.

Growth of Women's Hockey

When looking at the series of events the women's ice hockey team has been through over the past two years and the crossover of how the media has covered them, it is important to ask the question of what this has all actually accomplished for the growth of the sport, if anything. In March 2019 the *Wall Street Journal* published an article discussing how the sport of figure skating is losing some of its numbers to ice hockey. To explain why so many young girls as of recent have turned in their figure skates for hockey skates, the author states:

One reason: Young girls have seen their grown-up counterparts shine on the ice, as the American women's team won the 2018 gold medal against Canada at the Winter Olympics. At the recent NHL All-Star Skills Competition, Olympian Kendall Coyne-Schofield competed in the Fastest Skater event, the first woman to do so.¹¹⁶

Girls growing up are now exposed to talented and professional female hockey players on television, magazines, social media, advertisements, etc. who serve as role models for this younger generation, and inspire them to lace up their hockey skates.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Chaker, Anne Marie. "For Many Girls, Figure Skating Loses its Edge to Hockey; A Surge in Girls' Ice Hockey Comes as Many Embrace Competitive Team Sport, Spurning the Makeup and Sequins Associated with Figure Skating." *Wall Street Journal (Online)*, Mar 05, 2019. <https://search.proquest.com/docview/2187973801?accountid=14405>.

The same article also declares ice hockey as “one of the latest previously male-dominated sports to see rising female participation.”¹¹⁷ Unlike many other sports that began to gain popularity soon after Title IX was passed, female interest in ice hockey began to pick up two decades later once it became an Olympic sport in 1998. If women’s ice hockey was still an Olympic event but there was no media coverage or visibility of the team outside of the games themselves, it would be unlikely that the popularity of women’s ice hockey would be as great as it is right now. It is the visibility and buzz that coincide with the Olympics- media features, promotions, face to face interaction, endorsements, etc.- that have effect on the growth of the sport.

To support this idea that the sport’s presence in the Olympics, and everything that comes along with that, has indeed sparked growth, it is helpful to look at trends in USA Hockey’s registration numbers. The total number of females registered with USA Hockey has increased each year since the sport’s Olympic debut. Since 1998, the periods with the greatest year to year increases in percent differences of the total number of females registered have consistently taken place during the year leading up to an Olympics and the year coming out of an Olympics. Following an Olympic year, these percent differences tend to slightly drop until the next set of Games are in session. For example, between the 2007-08 calendar year to 2008-09, two non-Olympic years, the percent difference of registered females was 0.1%. Between 2008-09 and 2009-10, the year of the Vancouver games, the percent difference increased to 3.5%. The percent growth increased again in the 2010-2011 year up to 6.49%. However, between 2010-11 and 2011-12, the percent difference dropped to 1.65%. The percent difference would not again

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

increase until 2013-2014, the year of the games at Sochi.¹¹⁸ The consistency of this cycle for the past 18 years (USA Hockey only displays female registration numbers since 2001) suggests that the rate by which females of all ages are signing up to play ice hockey is positively correlated to the presence of an Olympic tournament being in session.

The display of female registrations are broken down by age for the more recent years, and there is definitely significance in looking at the growth of the sport within different age groups. Every year since USA Hockey started distinguishing growth within specific age categories, the 7-8 year old section has consecutively yielded the greatest year to year percent growth rate. Over the past three years, the year to year registration rates of 7-8 year old females have increased by 10.54%, 11.41%, and 9.09% respectively, compared to all other age categories whose percent differences struggle to reach 2%.¹¹⁹ This indicates that in recent years, a great majority of girls are joining the sport for the first time at the young age of 7 or 8 years old. The explosion of girls starting at this younger age creates a sense of hope that the grassroots programs of women's hockey are indeed gaining traction with younger girls, giving players more time to develop their skills and ultimately reach higher calibers of competition. These remarkable rates of growth at younger ages suggest the Olympics serve as a catalyst for growing the game specifically from the bottom up.

The female registration growth rates are even more impressive when comparing them to male registration rates. While there are still many more boys playing hockey in the United States compared to girls, the rate at which more boys are starting to play has been significantly lower than that of girls. In 2017-18, male registration only grew by 0.72%, which is 6.5 times less than

¹¹⁸ "Membership Statistics." Membership Statistics. Accessed February 2019. <https://www.usahockey.com/membershipstats>.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

the female registration growth rate.¹²⁰ The changes in these male growth rates are also staggered and random, without any tangible pattern of when increases or decreases in the rates occur. The percent differences do not consistently rise surrounding an Olympic year for men like they do for women.

While the growth rates of female registrations are still high compared to those of males, and while the Olympics appear to push up these numbers, the year to year percent growth rate has yet to reach the level it was once at during the first few years after Nagano. The first and second Olympic games that included women's ice hockey triggered skyrocketing growth for the women's game. Between 2001-02, the year of the Salt Lake City Olympics, and 2002-03, the sport experienced an 8.7% increase, and 7.7% the following year.¹²¹ These huge jumps in enrollment are what the current Olympic players, commentators, sports writers, etc. are referring to when they discuss how women's hockey really did take off after its first appearance in the Olympics and the next couple of years to follow. While the 2018-19 registration numbers have not yet been released to the public by USA Hockey, there is still hope that the 2018 victory at PyeongChang and the resulting media attention the team received will trigger another exponential growth period similar to what took place 20 years ago.

Some of the current popularity of women's ice hockey also comes from the fact that it is riding on a wave of female empowerment right now. Over the last couple of years, campaigns such as the #MeToo movement and others revolved women's strength and independence have triggered a broader and deeper discussion about women's rights, regarding everything from equal pay to sexual harassment. Female athletes are often thought of as symbols of this new

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Ibid.

wave of female empowerment and therefore used in advertisements or promotions for big name brands that wish to align themselves with these sorts of messages. Nike, for example, recently released a commercial titled “Dream Crazier” during the 2019 Oscars that aligns the company’s “Just Do It” theme with female athletes who have made history by breaking barriers and doing what people at one point perceived as crazy. The spot is narrated by Serena Williams and features other renown female athletes including gymnast Simone Biles, fencer Ibtihaj Muhammad (the first Muslim woman to wear a hijab while competing for the U.S. Olympic team), and members of the United States women’s soccer team. The commercial portrays the gender bias and discrimination that many female athletes endure. It exploits several negative adjectives such as “delusional,” “unhinged,” and “irrational” that female athletes are characterized as when they show passion for their sport or desire for fair treatment.¹²² Adidas has created similar advertisements focused on members of the women’s ice hockey team specifically. One short video published on Adidas’ official Instagram account features Kendall Coyne-Schofield discussing the stereotypes that come along with playing what is considered to be a male dominant sport. She closes with saying that she serves as living proof that these stereotypes about women’s size and strength not being enough to play a sport like hockey are false.¹²³ The team’s success on and off the ice since 2017 has occurred simultaneously with the shift towards a greater focus on female empowerment in society and media, influencing more people to pay attention to the team and what they’ve accomplished.

¹²² Nike. "Dream Crazier." Advertisement. February 25, 2019.

¹²³ Adidas. "She Breaks Barriers: Kendall Coyne Schofield." Advertisement. Youtube. March 16, 2019. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R_0vD36s1ZA.

Setbacks

The question to be asked beyond what the U.S. women's ice hockey team has done for their own sport, is about what their actions have done for the broader picture of the female athlete and gender equality. Despite the progress this team has made and the popularity of the sport right now, there is still much more to be done before it can be said that equality between the treatment of male and female athletes has been reached. Despite the fact that Kendall Coyne Schofield's impressive run at the NHL All-Star Skills Competition, as well as her broadcasting stint, showcased both the talent and knowledge female hockey players possess, the negative drawbacks of the situation were unfortunately just as noticeable and talked about in the media. With most steps forward in the movement towards equality, setbacks or limitations are often brought to the surface, and in this case, one man's apparent issue with having a female by his side while doing his job served as that obstruction.

As much as this opportunity may have been looked at as a "glass ceiling" shattering moment for female athletes, there were parts of it that revealed how patronized the sports broadcasting world still can be today. Pierre McGuire, one of NBC's analysts for NHL events, was ridiculed on Twitter and several news outlets for "mansplaining" hockey to Kendall Coyne-Schofield during her appearance on the NHL game telecast, despite her obvious knowledge of the sport.¹²⁴ The two were doing the pregame coverage together, during which McGuire condescendingly pointed out to Coyne-Schofield "Tampa's going to be on your left. Pittsburgh's going to be on your right," as if she would not be able to figure that out for herself. During the

¹²⁴ Bieler, Des. "Pierre McGuire Tried Mansplaining Hockey to Kendall Coyne Schofield, and Twitter Wasn't Having It." *Washington Post*, January 30, 2019. https://www.washingtonpost.com/sports/2019/01/31/nbcs-pierre-mcguire-slammed-cringeworthy-treatment-kendall-coyne-schofield/?utm_term=.ee6869d16e50.

same conversation he stated “What are you expecting out of this game? We’re paying you to be an analyst, not to be a fan tonight,” almost as if she was unfit or underprepared to broadcast the game and unaware that she was indeed there for a reason. At the All Star Skills Competition only a week prior, McGuire was commentating the event she competed in and as she was skating off the ice, he put his arms around her waist in what many considered to be a very inappropriate way. The moment was caught on camera and a video clip of it went viral on Twitter, receiving a ton a backlash from viewers everywhere. The uproar on social media indicated that McGuire’s comments and actions did not go unnoticed, and were widely perceived as improper behavior. The *Washington Post* described McGuire’s interactions with the gold medalist as cringeworthy, and concluded that “It’s likely that, at this point, more than a few hockey fans would be willing to pay McGuire just to be a fan — and not to be an analyst.”¹²⁵

Another example that demonstrates the obstacles that remain is the fact that Nike, the official apparel supplier of USA Hockey and the same company who promoted the power of female athletes in their “Dream Crazier” commercial, still does not sell jerseys or other products featuring members of the women’s team. The only way for someone to own a “Hilary Knight” or “Meghan Duggan” jersey, for example, is to customize one of the men’s team jersey’s on Nike’s website and insert a player’s name and number.¹²⁶ With this example we are seeing that enforcing gender equality is much easier said than done. While Nike may align themselves with women’s empowerment through their branding and promote these ideas, the message becomes shallower when it is evident that they do not carry it out with their actions. USA Hockey also

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Berkman, Seth. "Hefty Raises, Olympic Gold, and Then Crumbs for U.S. Women’s Hockey." *New York Times*, April 3, 2019. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/04/03/sports/us-womens-national-team-hockey.html>.

does not sell jerseys of female players on its online store. In regard to the lack of accessible merchandise for fans of the women's team, Coyne-Schofield stated "That alone is so degrading...Right now, women's hockey is not accessible to consumers. It needs to be accessible in every fashion."¹²⁷

Coyne-Schofield's statement does provide evidence that times have changed for female athletes and how they expect to be treated. While in context the message of her statement might be negative, her use of the word "degrading" to describe how she feels about something as isolated or minor as the lack of available merchandise for fans actually shows improvement in our society's awareness of inequality. Years ago, it would have been unimaginable for Nike or USA Hockey to even consider having female hockey players' jerseys for sale, but clearly we have reached a point when a player finds it "degrading" that such jerseys are not available. A more detailed discussion about the equal or unequal conditions of female athletes is now a part of the national consciousness.

The *New York Times* published an article in April 2019 that explains even though "there has never been a better time to be a member of the United States women's national hockey team," the future of the sport may not look as bright as the present. The author highlights the irony that although the team has reached several pinnacles of success in recent years, there are still many flaws in the way they are represented and treated. Most of the issues discussed in the article stem from how USA Hockey has been slow to develop the "groundbreaking support" they promised the team in 2017. The governing body's incompetence can be seen through the "invisibility" of the Women's High Performance Advisory Group that was formed as a result of the deal, the lingering lack of diversity in USA Hockey's leadership, and the organization's

¹²⁷ Ibid.

resistance to seize all possible media opportunities for the women's team. While the team has clearly received attention from various media outlets as it has gained momentum over the past several years in the midst of a social movement for gender equality, many players on the team were upset about other missed opportunities for exposure. Even though the team did embark on a week long national media tour after the Olympics, USA Hockey failed to capitalize on other opportunities such as "high-profile media appearances before the Olympics like a national magazine feature, a major network documentary series and other live television offers." In Hilary Knight's opinion, "the team disappeared when its popularity was at its highest."¹²⁸

Now is a crucial point in the trajectory of women's hockey and its impact on gender equality, where it must stay in the eye of the media without fading away until the next Olympics. Whether or not this happens is primarily in the hands of USA Hockey. The organization has indeed publicly acknowledged that it is aware of the need for more gender balance in its directory and change in its culture to advance more opportunities for females. However, we are still at a point where "you need to change the minds of males in the room," since they are the ones in charge, as stated by the first women hired by USA Hockey in 1988, Lynn Olsen. Decisions that have great impact and affect the culture of such a large organization start from the top and trickle down, and it is essential that the number of females on USA Hockey's board of directors grows beyond the current 17%. Pat Kelleher was named the new executive director of USA Hockey in April 2017, and he has made a good impression on several women on the national team thus far. Veterans on the team have found it promising that Kelleher has been

¹²⁸ Ibid.

meeting with players over the past few months to discuss the future of USA Hockey's support of female players.¹²⁹

Beyond Ice Hockey

The United States Women's soccer team has always been an inspiration for the hockey team in its push for equality. Therefore, it is helpful to consider where the soccer team currently stands in their own struggle for equality to see how ice hockey compares, and to get a better understanding of the general landscape of how female athletes are treated in America. In contrast to the lack of available merchandise for hockey team fans, Nike does in fact have replicas of the women's jerseys available for fans to purchase. The company also recently released that for the first time, it will be designing the women's team jerseys specifically for the female body, rather than deriving them from the design of the men's team jerseys in preparation for the 2019 Women's World Cup this coming June. The women's team has won three World Cup Championships and four Olympic gold medals, while the United States men's soccer team has won neither. Yet, up until now the women's team was never designed their own original jerseys to fit the female body. The *New York Times* labeled the notion of designing the women's team their own jersey cut as a "symbol of parity." This change is significant because uniforms are an expression of a team's identity, unity, and internal equality amongst its members, and Nike was depriving the team of these assets until the players demanded "We want our own thing" in regard to fit and design.¹³⁰

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Friedman, Vanessa. "Women Finally Get Their Own World Cup Soccer Style." *New York Times*, March 11, 2019. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/11/style/womens-world-cup-kit-nike.html?module=inline>.

U.S. Soccer has several social media channels solely dedicated to the women's national team, while USA Hockey does not own any social media pages designated for focus on the women's team. The sport of women's soccer has been more widely popular across the world for a longer amount of time than women's ice hockey has, so it is understandable that it has a slight step ahead than the latter in some of the accessibility and amenities it currently has. The team has stretched over generations as a leading and impactful program in the fight for women's equality, but even so, the soccer team still has a long way to go before it can settle. In March 2019, the 28 members of the U.S. women's soccer team filed a gender discrimination lawsuit against its own governing body, U.S. Soccer. The team's frustrations are similar to the ones the hockey team had with the leadership of USA Hockey back in 2017. The *New York Times* reported that the lawsuit alleges U.S. Soccer for violating the Equal Pay Act, Title IX, and the Civil Rights Act. Issues beyond the team's paychecks are addressed, including "where they play and how often, how they train, the medical treatment and coaching they receive, and even how they travel to matches."¹³¹ This lawsuit has launched the team to the forefront of a broader fight for equality and women's sports, the same way the hockey team fell under the spotlight, received praise, and became a symbol of this broader movement when their dispute occurred.

When compared to the men's national soccer team, the women play more games than them, and win a higher percentage of the games they play but are still paid less by the federation. It can be difficult to compare the compensation of the men's and women's teams, since each team has its own separate agreement with U.S. Soccer in how they are paid, but disparities are

¹³¹ Das, Andrew. "U.S. Women's Soccer Team Sues U.S. Soccer for Gender Discrimination." *New York Times*, March 8, 2019. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/08/sports/womens-soccer-team-lawsuit-gender-discrimination.html?module=inline>.

still noticeable. The most prominent disparity appears in the multi-million dollar bonuses the teams receive for competing in the World Cup. While the competing 32 men's teams receive a pool of \$400 million, the women's teams receive a pool of \$30 million.¹³²

This is not the first time the U.S. soccer team has taken legal action in attempt to protect their rights. In 2000, right after the American team won the 1999 World Cup, they boycotted an Australian tournament to show their anger with U.S. Soccer about their pay. In 2016, five members of the team and the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission filed a wage discrimination complaint against the governing body. Now, after three years of limited action in response to the complaint, the players were given permission from the federal agency to take more prominent action and sue. Extreme disparities can also be seen when comparing the pay of WNBA players to their NBA counterparts. To put things in perspective, A'ja Wilson, the WNBA's top draft pick in 2018, earned about \$53,000 in her first season. Deandre Ayton, the NBA's top draft pick last year, earned approximately \$6.8 million.¹³³ According to Neena Chaudhry, the general counsel of the National Women's Law Center in Washington, lawsuits over pay disparity of female athletes come time and time again without ever being truly resolved. "These are the same kinds of arguments and claims that we still see at every level of education for women and girls, from K through 12 to college. It's unfortunately a sad continuation of the way that women and girls in sports are treated in the U.S." she told the *New York Times*.¹³⁴

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Salam, Maya. "The Long Fight for Pay Equality in Sports." *New York Times*, March 11, 2019. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/11/sports/us-womens-soccer-pay.html?smid=nytcore-ios-share>.

¹³⁴ Das, "U.S. Women's Soccer..."

Epilogue

Every time a female athlete or team steps out and speaks their mind about inequalities they face or demands equal treatment, they are propelled into the media's spotlight. Media outlets turn these moments into headlines, and big-name brands use them as publicity opportunities to pair up with the athletes at hand to represent their brand. Athletic success of female athletes on the ice, field, court, etc. creates the same sort of reaction in a more indirect way, since teams or individual athletes are leveraged into the public eye and therefore have the opportunity to address pressing issues in front of an audience.

These moments force our society to think about the present image of the female athlete, which often exploits and raises awareness of existing inequalities. While change for the better does sometimes come out of moments like a labor dispute or Olympic gold medal, it is evident that major, widespread change cannot be initiated by the athletes alone. The hockey team's two gold medals made a name for their sport and their team, and increased nation-wide participation in the sport among young girls. The team's strike became a milestone in the broader landscape of gender equality in sports, and ultimately drove USA Hockey leadership to make some changes including increasing players' salaries, equalizing travel arrangements and insurance coverage between the women's and men's teams. The team's efforts created a space for them to be treated as legitimate athletes, but they had to do this themselves. They were not simply given the glory and media attention that comes with winning a gold medal, they had to earn it through a messy, career-risking labor dispute months before the games were even played. Even with these steps forward, they are not enough to trigger a more extensive change. The leadership of federations like USA Hockey or U.S. Soccer that governs the sport and employs professional female athletes must take part in creating a more equal environment in the world of athletics. Without a change

in thinking of those at the top and action that reflects more modern and progressive ideologies that give female athletes respect and equal treatment, the status of the female athlete in America will not progress the way it should.

There is no concrete benchmark that determines when things are equal and when they are not, which makes the search for solutions much more complicated. Have we reached equality when all female athletes are being paid as much as their male counterparts? Or when women are featured on as many Sports Illustrated covers as men? Or when there are just as many spectators in the arena for an NWHL game as an NHL game? There is no definitive answer to any of these questions, but they do offer suggestions for the criteria by which we should be judging the state of gender equity around us. Wage is one of the more stable and judgeable determinants, which is why we hear about it so often when we are talking about the fight for gender equality in sports. We can examine two female teams that have had similar success and compare how they are paid, what sort of publicity efforts their governing bodies put towards them, how accessible their merchandise is, among many other tangible identifiers. We can also compare a female team to their male counterpart to understand whether the differences in how teams are treated are based upon gender. Things like wage or quantity of media coverage can be pinpointed as areas that can be improved upon in terms of enforcing a greater sense of equality.

On the other hand, there are many more intangible components that reflect deep-rooted ideologies of our society's perception of female athletes. An example would be the subtle undertones or connotations in the rhetoric of media about female athletes vs. male athletes, which are much more subjective and complex to breakdown. These mentalities have existed throughout the history of sports and they are what often keep female athletes in inferior positions and allow inequality to persist. Mass ideologies about female athletes are much harder to change

than increasing a player's salary or improving travel conditions, but of the growth of the discussion surrounding the need for change leads us in the right direction. The Olympics is a worldwide, influential platform that has the power to trigger the discussion that needs to happen in order to shift these mentalities.

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