Gender and the Organization of Women's Professional Soccer

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THESIS

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This thesis is dedicated to my parents, Lynne and Grant Allison, who have supported my work from the beginning and without whom this degree would not have been possible.

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SUMMARY

Women's participation in sport at all levels has risen dramatically in the past four decades. This is particularly true for soccer, which has become the top participation sport for girls in the U.S. In the 1990's the U.S. Women's National Team began to attract significant media and public attention beginning with the 1996 Olympic Games and extending to the Women's World Cups from 1999 on. Still, sport remains the site of persistent gender disparities in training resources, pay, leadership, and media airtime, among other measures. Nowhere is continuing inequality more apparent than at the level of professional team sport, where women's leagues in basketball, softball, football, volleyball, and soccer have failed.

The larger question I address with this dissertation concerns the possibilities and challenges that the current environment presents for professional women's sport and how this environment is understood and engaged with by those working for women's sport. I conducted a 14-month ethnographic study with a women's professional soccer team I call the "Momentum." My study included participant observation as an unpaid staff member, in-depth interviews with 55 stakeholders, and the collection of media data.

The biggest finding to emerge from my research is the existence of "business" and "cause" institutional logics that spell out different models for the goals and practices of women's soccer. Both logics were part of the complex institutional environment that women's professional soccer felt itself to be in and presented the league with different routes toward cultural visibility and financial viability. The major contribution of my research is to demonstrate the salience of gender to how these logics were understood and worked out in practice at the Momentum from 2011-2012. I document a shift from logic balance to the dominance of the

SUMMARY (continued)

business approach that is strongly tied to both a gender divide in logic adoption and the gendered

hierarchy of staff.

I. INTRODUCTION

A.   **<u>Kicking Off</u>**

On July 10, 1999, I huddled eagerly in front of the television to the watch the championship game of the Women's World Cup. I was 14 years old, in the summer between middle school and high school. I had played soccer for half of my life. My parents enrolled me in the local youth league at the age of 7. After my interest and skills in the sport grew, I asked to be signed up for competitive travel teams. Now my weeknights and weekends revolved around the sport, with practices, games, and tournaments structuring my time outside of school. My younger sisters also played sports. My middle sister was an accomplished gymnast, while my youngest sister preferred martial arts. In fact, almost every girl I knew at school played sports. My family and my teachers encouraged me to play, believing in the benefits of sport participation for girls. My 8th grade English teacher, an avid runner, regularly declared it "Running and Reading Day" and took her students for jogs around the neighborhood. I competed ferociously during the school's yearly jump rope charity event and strove to earn the President's Fitness medal by meeting national benchmarks in speed and strength. Other opportunities for formal sport participation abounded. My middle school had offered track and field, basketball, and volleyball, and my high school would offer cross country, soccer, swimming and diving, and tennis, among other sports. Surrounded by available sport leagues, as well as a popular discourse of girls' empowerment through physical activity, playing organized sport seemed like a normal part of white, middle class girlhood in the 1990s.

The same was not true for my Mother. Born in 1957, she was 15 by the time Title IX legislation passed in 1972 and opportunities for sport participation began to increase for girls.

When I asked my Mother about her childhood, she told me that while she had played sports informally in the backyard, chances at organized sport had been few and far between. It wasn't until junior year that her high school had offered its first women's sport team, in volleyball. She also faced significant opposition to her participation in sport from family members, friends, and teachers. Her five brothers teased her mercilessly about wanting to play football with them. And her Mother, my Grandmother, feared that sports were inappropriate for girls and would place her daughter at risk for injury.

When she joined her high school volleyball team in the 1970s, my Mother was at the vanguard of the gender transformation and rise of youth sport. When my Mother was a child, formal sport participation was almost entirely male dominated. By the time I was born in 1984, youth sport was quickly becoming a different world. The boom in organized youth sport that began in the 1970s included both boys and girls. However, much of the rise of youth sport from this decade on can be traced to the growth of opportunities for girls (Messner, 2009). Soccer was at the forefront of this shift, becoming a top participation sport for girls in the 1980s. By 1999, "the Soccer Industry Council estimated that approximately 7.4 million American females played, most of them girls" (Fields, 2005, p. 98). Rising rates of girls' sport participation were reflected in popular culture, where images of female athletes proliferated in mass media. As Heywood and Dworkin (2003) note, the female athlete moved from obscurity to attain the status of cultural icon in the 1990s. They call attention to the novelty of this change in writing that, "Female athletes were once oddities, goddesses, or monsters, exceptions to every social rule. Now the female athlete is an institution" (Heywood and Dworkin, 2003, p. xvi).

Nowhere was this new institution more evident than in the successes of the 1999 Women's World Cup. I recall feeling awed by the presence of aggressive and talented

sportswomen on prime time TV. I avidly followed every game of the tournament, tracing the

U.S. through multiple rounds until my heart beat nearly out of its chest as the U.S. emerged

victorious from a penalty kick shootout against China. And I was not alone in my fandom. Over

90,000 fans packed the Rose Bowl in California for the final, then record attendance at a

women's sporting event. The tournament exceeded all expectations for attendance and profit,

evidence for some that the upcoming decade heralded "a new era for women and women's

empowerment" in sport (Christopherson, Janning, and McConnell, 2002, p. 171).

The successes of this tournament in ticket sales, corporate sponsor dollars, and media

airtime sparked optimism for the continued growth of women's soccer. Shortly after the

tournament, a group of wealthy investors from the world of mass media formed the first

professional league for women in U.S. history. Kicking off in 2000, the Women's United Soccer

Association (WUSA) featured Women's World Cup stars such as Mia Hamm, Julie Foudy,

Brandi Chastain, and Briana Scurry. While I was never able to attend a WUSA game given my

residence in rural Iowa, I followed the league closely through mainstream and online media. As I

was finishing high school in 2003 and looking forward to playing soccer in college, I read the

terrible news. The league had folded after three seasons, with many suggesting WUSA had

simply been too big, too soon.

WUSA was not the only women's professional league to fail through the 1990s and into

the 2000s. Women's professional basketball, softball, volleyball, and football leagues had also

failed during this time period. WUSA was not unique, but merely one recent and short-lived

example of a larger pattern. On the whole, the historical trajectory of women's professional team

sport appeared more roller coaster than linear. Seeing this struggle, I wondered about the

disjuncture between media celebrations of soccer star Mia Hamm and the challenges faced by the

national league that she played in. Why hadn't the demographic transformation of youth sport been accompanied by a similar transformation in elite sport? Why hadn't increased media visibility for many female athletes translated into increased interest in women's professional team sport leagues? Why did there seem to be a persistent glass ceiling on women's advancement in professional sport?

B.   **Entering the Field**

I was an MA student studying in Chicago when I picked up a copy of a local newspaper. It was 2008, or maybe early into 2009. I read about the upcoming first season of a new women's soccer league, Women's Professional Soccer (WPS). Chicago would be home to a team that would play on the south side at Toyota Park, a soccer-specific stadium built for the men's professional team. Although my soccer playing had decreased to weekly intramural games on campus, my love for the game and fond memories of the WUSA years motivated my interest in this new league. I paid for a season ticket that first season and brought friends and family members to home games with me. As an early fan and season ticket holder I attended several small, invite-only events with players and staff. I also attended viewings of other soccer games at local soccer bars that were organized by the team. The more I spoke informally with team staff and, less frequently, players, the more I gained a sense for the difficulties the league faced at its inception. For the Chicago team, the expense of playing in a stadium they could not fill was substantial, not to mention the sometimes tense relationships with staff of the men's league they worked with as co-occupants of the stadium, and the challenges of a location hard to reach by public transit. Through my early fandom, I gained an appreciation for what was going on behind

the scenes. The excitement surrounding the play on the field during game days was far removed from the challenging, often exhausting work necessary to sell the game.

Throughout 2009, I became increasingly interested in understanding the challenges faced by the league, particularly given the history of failure for women's pro soccer. I decided to pursue research on WPS. As an interpretive method concerned with immersion and participation in an ongoing social world, I felt that ethnography was the best method for answering my questions about decision making as the league encountered challenges over time. I wanted to spend time inside a team office, privy to the daily interactions involved in building and selling women's soccer. In early 2010, I wrote a proposal for an ethnographic study of one team that offered my services as an unpaid staff member. By the time I had decided to pursue research on the league, the Chicago team had bowed out of WPS. In fact, there had been quite a bit of team change in the league, evidence of the instability that often characterizes professional leagues in their early years. Given this instability, I emailed my proposal to the three existing teams that had the most stable history with the league. The first to bite, and my eventual field site, was a team I pseudonymously call the Momentum. The Momentum was located forty-five minutes north of a large urban city in the southern U.S.

As I discussed the details of my entrance to the team as an unpaid staff member and participant observer, it became clear that the Momentum was willing to take me on because of the skills I offered to them for free. I had proposed to conduct a survey of Momentum fans at 2011 home games in order to gather demographic data to be analyzed and used by the team. What I didn't know when I wrote my proposal was that the team that had played under the name of "Momentum" in WUSA, the first women's pro soccer league, had employed a group of academics from a local public university to conduct just such a fan survey. The report the

research team had put together on the demographic composition of fans had been passed down to the new Momentum and served as a prime source of information on the market for the sport in the local area. In the eyes of the Assistant General Manager, who first read my proposal and contacted me about joining the team, a survey of fans was important work and my academic credential a source of expertise. My abilities in survey research and statistical analysis, then, were crucial to my access. My access was also facilitated by my knowledge of the women's game and background as a longtime fan. For instance, after I had demonstrated knowledge of the league in my first week in the field, one Momentum staff member remarked that it was "so nice" to have someone on board who already knew details about WPS and didn't "have to be told everything."

I came to the team in March of 2011, two months before the season began. When I first joined the staff, I was introduced immediately to Jordan, the female Momentum manager I would work with most closely. Over time, I learned that I had been assigned Jordan's supervision by the team's Assistant General Manager for several reasons. First, the fan survey data I would collect was deemed most directly relevant to Jordan's job as manager of both corporate partnerships and community events. Second, Jordan was also new to the staff in 2011 and did not yet have interns or other help assigned to her. Throughout the course of my fieldwork, I was variously described by Momentum staff as an intern, a researcher, a student, someone "doing the fan survey," and someone "helping out" the team. In many cases, my affiliation with the team was connected to Jordan (as in "This is Rachel, who is helping Jordan this season"), evidence of Jordan's centrality to my positioning with the Momentum.

My direct supervision by Jordan was both a benefit and a challenge to my work as a researcher. As one of the few paid staff members, Jordan occupied an important role with the

team. Being tied to Jordan gave me legitimacy with the Momentum. I was welcome almost anywhere and everywhere that the team went. Because of the specifics of Jordan's job, I was invited to attend sponsor pitches, meetings with the owner, and community appearances, events that might have been off-limits to me had it not been for her influence. As a recent graduate from college who was about my age, Jordan and I developed a personal friendship. This friendship was a source of ethical tension for me as I negotiated my dual roles as staff member and researcher, even as it was a major turning point in becoming integrated into the team. When other staff saw that Jordan and I had a positive relationship they opened up to me considerably, inviting me to lunch, asking about my graduate program and my study, and sharing information about their jobs and their perspectives on the league. In some moments, however, Jordan made my research quite challenging. While Jordan knew I was studying the team and its ongoing dynamics she had a lot of work to accomplish daily and sometimes asked me to complete tasks that took me away from the office. On several occasions I was frustrated by these requests because they prevented me from observing staff meetings or other important events. I never declined any task that Jordan asked of me, however. I wanted to contribute to the team and needed to maintain the relationship that was key to my ongoing access.

Jordan's supervision also shaped my data by determining my spatial placement within the office. For the majority of my study the Momentum occupied one U-shaped floor in a squat brick office building. One arm of the U was largely unused, containing a kitchen, bathrooms, and a copy room with a few cubicles. The other arm contained offices on both sides of the hallway that were assigned to ticketing, media, and corporate sponsor staff and interns. The main hallway that connected the two arms held a large conference room with glass doors, spacious offices for the Office Manager and Chief Finance Officer, and in one far corner, the owner's office. This corner

office was the largest on the floor and was somewhat set apart from the rest of the office space. I shared a room along the arm dotted with staff office spaces with Jordan, media manager Grace, and the several interns who worked with Grace. I was given a cubicle in this office room to work out of and spent much of my time observing what went on in this room. My proximity to Jordan, Grace, and the media interns meant that I saw much more of their work than I did other staff members'. However, the close friendships between Jordan, Grace, and the ticketing staff (Kendall and Chris), as well as the physical proximity of their offices, generated substantial interaction with the ticketing department on a daily basis. I saw somewhat less of the daily work of those in the main hallway – owner Steve, Chief Finance Officer Rich, and Office Manager Sandra. Importantly, the spatial boundaries in the office mapped along the lines of power; those farther away from me had more decision making authority.

I also spent less time observing and talking with players than I did with office staff at the Momentum. One reason for this was the clash of player and staff schedules. When the players were not out of town for an away game, they practiced twice a day, in the morning and in the afternoon. Players only very rarely came into the office. They commonly scattered widely after practice, going to second jobs, social events throughout the metropolitan area, or houses and apartments across the local area. While I did informally interview players at community events, on game days and during a few practices, I often had to choose between observing the players in the moments they would congregate and spending time in the office with staff. As my animating research question concerned the challenges faced by those selling the sport, I made a decision to focus predominantly on staff to the detriment of getting a fuller view of player perspectives on the league.

A second reason for the relative paucity of information on players was the tension that existed intermittently between players and staff. This tension emerged out of the financial concerns of players, many of whom were not earning high enough salaries for the season to avoid second jobs. Given that many players worked other jobs or relied heavily on family members for financial support, issues such as scheduling community events often became highly contentious. From the perspective of many office staff members the players and staff were "in it together" and should all pitch in to help promote the team. For many of the players, requests that they spend unpaid time at community appearances or playing clinics that had not been in their contracts were exploitative. These ongoing tensions translated into players' skepticism of staff, a feeling that was sometimes directed at me. In choosing to focus my attention on the staff, I had inextricably linked myself to their interests in the eyes of players.

My daily work in the office changed from the beginning to the end of my fieldwork. Some of this change reflected shifts in the work that needed to be done during the season, compared to the offseason. Some variation was also idiosyncratic as needs arose unexpectedly. Much of this shift, however, reflected evolving conceptions of what types of work were more or less important in selling the team. Although working for the team was in part a cover, the justification for my presence as observer, my work was also important data on perceptions of the relative importance of tasks and shifting power dynamics among staff.

On any given day, there were a series of small scale bureaucratic or intern-type tasks to be accomplished. These rarely took very long, comprising one or two hours of an eight hour office day. I labeled envelopes, stuffed gift bags, mailed tickets, answered phones, made copies, and, at times, left the office to run errands for the team. Apart from these mundane tasks, however, I was also expected to contribute to the selling and marketing of the team more

directly. In addition to the collection of fan survey data, which would occupy my time during

home games, Jordan expected me to work on a so-called "larger project." In our first-ever

meeting, she envisioned my larger project as something to demonstrate ROI, or return on

investment, to corporate sponsors.

The primary focus of my work when I first joined the Momentum in March 2011 was

corporate sponsorship. I helped Jordan put together sponsor packages to pitch to companies. This

involved determining what various sponsor options for the team were worth (an exercise that was

rich data in and of itself), putting together package options at several price points, and creating

attractive Power Points and printed materials to present to potential sponsors. I also worked on

sponsor fulfillment, or collecting evidence that the Momentum was promoting its sponsors in the

ways required by sponsor contracts. I roamed the stadium on game days with a camera, looking

to document sponsor logos. I stalked the tent-filled sidewalks of local community events with my

camera, looking for the same. And I carefully tracked sponsor presence in the newsletter.

The Momentum offered its sponsors the opportunity to include a company logo and

website link in the team's weekly e-newsletter. The newsletter was put together by media

manager Grace and her interns and sent via email to fans. Since I was responsible for tracking

sponsor fulfillment, I communicated with Grace weekly about the sponsor logos and links to

include in the newsletter. After the newsletter was sent, I would create digital snapshots of the

logos to put into electronic folders, evidence for sponsors that the team was holding up its end of

the bargain. After I asked Grace several times about the number of people who received the

newsletter, she gave me the login information to the software used for the newsletter. This way I

could track statistics related to the newsletter myself, freeing Grace to pursue other activities

The overlap between my work with sponsorship and my knowledge of the newsletter made me the prime target to take over newsletter production when Grace felt she needed to delegate this task. For Grace, the Women's World Cup in the summer of 2011 increased her workload enormously. Because of team owner Steve's hopes that the tournament would generate increased interest in the team, Grace was expected to ramp up coverage in mainstream media outlets. She also increased the internal production of media to release publicly via the team website and social media. In this context, Grace felt she and her interns did not have time to devote to the weekly newsletter. Rather than discontinue the newsletter, however, it was assigned to me around June of 2011. At the same time as national media coverage gained in importance at the expense of weekly local marketing, Jordan faced a new context for her work as well. Steve had brought in an outside consultant to reorganize the work of the office with the goal of maximizing the potential for profit. A manager of men's professional soccer teams in Europe, Sasha prioritized corporate partner deals as central to the team's success. Given the elevated importance of sponsorship after Sasha's entrance to the team, it was no longer acceptable to give this valuable work to the help. As an unpaid intern with no authority on the team, I was given whatever was seen as necessary, but unimportant work. That my duties for the team shifted from sponsorship to the newsletter are evidence of the shifting priorities of the team.

As a participant observer, I did to some extent influence the processes that I observed in the field. For example, I attended a local road race with Jordan and several players one weekend afternoon. As we clustered under the Momentum tent to chat during a lull in the post-race crowd, Jordan informed the players that they had been scheduled to appear at an upcoming Juneteenth celebration put on by the team's biggest sponsor. When one player asked Jordan what Juneteenth was, Jordan paused before responding that Juneteenth was "controversial" as a celebration of the

emancipation of slaves. After digesting this, one of the players said, "So there's like going to be a lot of black people there." This sparked hushed discussion among Jordan and the players, all of whom were white, about their hesitance to attend this event. Standing next to the group, but not participating in this talk, I was frustrated by what I perceived to be racial prejudice. I was unable to refrain from commenting aloud that the team should view this event as an opportunity to build awareness among a new market. In reframing the event as a positive for the team, I clearly communicated my disapproval of the current talk. Taking my hint about the inappropriateness of their conversation, the group quickly agreed that the appearance could be helpful in marketing the team and changed the subject. In this case I directly shaped the interactions I observed by purposely shifting a conversation. To the extent possible, however, I tried to exist as an inconspicuous presence on the team, and refrained from expressing direct opinions or acting outside of the direction of others. I was aided in my efforts to remain unobtrusive by my low-ranking position with the team. Defined largely as an intern supervised by Jordan, I was almost never asked my opinion about the team's direction and had no decision making power whatsoever. My role was to follow others' orders, with the exception of the collection of survey data.

As is often the case in ethnographic research, an unexpected event integrally shaped my field work. On January 30, 2012, WPS announced it would be suspending play for the 2012 season. Approximately a month later, the league folded altogether. For those of us inside WPS, this had been a possible, but undesirable outcome. Several sources of conflict had come to a head in the months before the announcement. An ongoing lawsuit with one team owner had become inordinately expensive. The exit of this man's team from the league left WPS with 5 teams. U.S. Soccer, the national sanctioning organization for professional soccer, required the league to find

additional investors for a 6th team. And the 2012 Olympics presented serious scheduling challenges for the stars of the women's game. As I show here, these proximate causes for the league's failure built on ongoing challenges that had existed since the league's inception. Still, the announcement of the league's folding was a major blow to staff, players, and fans.

The organization's failure also affected a major shift in my research. After the January announcement of suspension, Momentum owner Steve closed the team office and terminated the remaining employees with the exception of Office Manager Sandra, who stayed on to finalize financial matters. At this point, 11 months after I first joined the team, my field site closed. There was no longer anything to observe. I decided that the best course of action would be to understand the widest possible number of perspectives on why the league had failed and what had gone wrong in WPS. I also wanted to get a sense as to whether the social dynamics I had witnessed in the Momentum office were similar in the work of other teams. I had formally interviewed the majority of Momentum staff before the league's failure. Now, I shifted from observation to semi-structured, in-depth interviews across the league. Using both my existing contacts and publicly available contact information, I began to request interviews with staff elsewhere. By May of 2012, I had interviewed stakeholders from every team that had played in WPS. I expanded my interviews beyond staff to include media personnel who covered the league, sponsors of the league, and Momentum season ticket holders. I conducted 55 interviews total.

Table 1 reports the pseudonyms of my participants, as well as demographic information. I interviewed slightly more men than women (55 percent to 45 percent). Participants ranged in age from 18 to 60, with an average age of 37. The vast majority (89 percent) of my interviewees were white, although I did interview one Latina woman, one black woman, and 4 black men. 44

percent of my participants worked for WPS. A quarter (25 percent) were either sponsors of the league or media, while 31 percent were fans. It is important to note, however, that these represent WPS affiliations only at the time of the interview. The affiliations of those I spoke to had varied over time. For instance, some season ticket holders had worked for women's professional soccer in the past (N= 4). Other fans volunteered for the league (N= 8). Several media personnel had also been employed by WPS at one time or other. In total, 75 percent of my interview participants had ever worked for women's professional soccer. What I present here is the "master status" of those individuals I interviewed around the time of WPS' folding. All of these individuals, however, were deeply invested in and knowledgeable about the league.

I also did archival research and content analysis of media data on both the Momentum and WPS. As early as 2009, I began compiling both hard copy and electronic articles that covered the league. I created a Google search alert for "women's professional soccer" that linked me to articles in mainstream news sources. I routinely searched *Sports Illustrated* and ESPN websites. ESPN launched its online news site for women, ESPNW, at the time that I was entering the field, and this site was a source of consistent media coverage for WPS. Also, my fandom had familiarized me with popular soccer blog sites that posted about the league, including BigSoccer.com and EqualizerSoccer.com.

I learned early on in my WPS fandom that the social media platform Twitter was an important source of information on the league. I first heard about many of the major developments in the league via Twitter, including player signings, game outcomes, and even the league's folding. Before the 2011 season began, I created a spreadsheet of all staff and players in the league based on information from team websites. Using my own account, which had been

TABLE 1
INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS

Name	Sex	Age	Race	Affiliation
1. Alicia	F	18	White	Media
2. Amy	F	40	White	Manager
3. Anne	F	45	White	Staff
4. April	F	42	White	Fan
5. Brad	M	36	White	Media
6. Carl	M	38	White	Fan
7. Carol	F	31	White	Fan
8. Catherine	F	42	White	Fan
9. Cherish	F	54	White	Fan
10. Chris	M	36	White	Manager
11. Christine	F	50	White	Manager
12. Courtney	F	44	White	Manager
13. Cristina	F	20	Latina	Fan
14. Curtis	M	45	White	Sponsor
15. Daniel	M	41	White	Staff
16. David	M	35	White	Staff
17. Davis	M	55	White	Manager
18. Dean	M	37	White	Fan
19. Derrick	M	30	White	Media
20. Dillon	M	20	Black	Staff
21. Donna	F	38	White	Fan
22. Erin	F	32	White	Fan
23. Grace	F	24	Black	Manager
24. Kendall	F	30	White	Manager
25. Kyle	M	24	White	Media
26. James	M	43	White	Staff
27. Janine	F	25	White	Media
28. Jared	M	30	White	Fan
29. Jason	M	25	White	Staff
30. Jeanette	F	22	White	Media
31. Jerome	M	52	Black	Sponsor
32. Jerry	M	49	White	Staf

33. Jessie	F	27	White	Media
34. Jim	M	44	White	Fan
35. Jordan	F	23	White	Manager
36. Joseph	M	42	White	Staff
37. Joshua	M	26	White	Media
38. Keith	M	38	White	Media
39. Kristy	F	24	White	Fan
40. Liz	F	35	White	Fan
41. Margaret	F	60	White	Fan
42. Mary Anne	F	34	White	Fan
43. Michael	M	36	White	Staff
44. Nathan	M	46	White	Sponsor
45. Paul	M	53	White	Fan
46. Raymond	M	30	White	Media
47. Renee	F	38	White	Staff
48. Ronald	M	56	Black	Staff
49. Stan	M	62	White	Sponsor
50. Stephen	M	41	White	Staff
51. Susannah	F	34	White	Fan
52. Tanya	F	29	White	Manager
53. Thomas	M	28	White	Staff
54. Tyrone	M	48	Black	Staff
55. Vincent	M	36	White	Manager

created in 2010, I followed all of those who had public Twitter accounts[1]. From May 2011 on, I

saved my most recent 24-hour Twitter feed nightly. My attention to social media allowed me to

see how players constructed identities as professional soccer players. It also allowed me to see

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[1] A public Twitter account is open for anyone to read and follow without needing the account owner's permission. This is in direct contrast to Facebook, where "friending" requires acceptance, with a greater assumption of privacy. In comparison to Facebook, Twitter operates as a far more public social media platform. The Institutional Review Board at UIC gave me permission to save public Twitter feeds.

how players and staff engaged publicly with some of the major issues that arose during the season, such as the lawsuit. Finally, as a public social media platform where any member can send public messages to another, Twitter data allowed me to see how WPS players and staff interacted virtually with fans, media personnel, and other commentators.

Throughout most of 2011, the low numbers of articles on the league outside of soccer blogs made me confident I had captured the bulk of media coverage of WPS. With the summer's Women's World Cup, however, media coverage of women's elite soccer exploded. The tournament became a major cultural event similar to the 1999 tournament, with a corresponding jump in mainstream mass media exposure. New articles appeared in my Google search alert every hour, and the cross posting of articles, often with slightly different titles, made it impossible for me to keep up. While I saved as much of the mainstream coverage as I could, there was too much for me to keep track of it all. My friends and family members helped me throughout the tournament, emailing me links to articles and cutting out print articles to save.

C.   <u>**League and Team Organization**</u>

As a league, Women's Professional Soccer (WPS) had a joint venture structure: each team was owned independently and was financially and legally separate from other teams. Collectively, all teams supported the league office, headed by a CEO. Power over the league was shared between the CEO and the board of directors, comprised of all team owners. This model is similar to the way that most professional sport leagues are structured in the U.S., but different from the single-entity model adopted by the first women's league, the Women's United Soccer Association (WUSA). While the joint venture structure of WPS meant that each team owner

(often ownership group) had significant freedom to operate outside of league oversight, there were several areas of formal regulation.

First, each team was constrained in their efforts to sign sponsors by contracts with league-wide sponsors. Each team was unable to sign sponsors whose product competed with the products offered by league sponsors. For instance, one WPS sponsor was a major bank, which meant that teams could not sign banks as sponsors. Both Momentum owner Steve and corporate sponsor manager Jordan often expressed frustration at this constraint, feeling that the team received little to no financial benefit from league-wide sponsor deals while being unable to pursue potentially lucrative local or regional partnerships. In addition, league sponsor contracts mandated efforts at promotion by each team. For instance, league contracts required that the Momentum place a given number of sponsor banners and advertisements in the stadium for home games. The lawsuit between one team owner and the league emerged in part out of this owner's unwillingness to meet minimal league sponsor requirements.

Second, each WPS team was constrained in its scheduling and operations by U.S. Soccer, the national organizing and sanctioning body for soccer, and the U.S. Women's National Team. Every WPS team had signed several women's national team players, which made scheduling a salient issue. National team players were well-known and attracted fans, so teams wanted to avoid scheduling games when they would be absent. Games played without national team members would see lowered attendance. The negative impact of national team absence on league outcomes was accepted during the Women's World Cup, as the tournament was expected to generate increased interest in the league. In other moments, scheduling issues between U.S. Soccer and WPS generated frustration among WPS staff. Although U.S. Soccer certainly had an interest in the ongoing development of women's elite soccer, they had no direct financial stake in

WPS. WPS staff sometimes argued that U.S. Soccer had minimal motivation to consider WPS'

interests in scheduling and felt that the league played second fiddle to the national team.

The question of whether national team players were fully invested in the league emerged

persistently in conversations with staff, players, and fans in a variety of spaces (in the office, in

interviews, via social media, etc.). National team players were paid both by U.S. Soccer and by

the league. Some WPS stakeholders believed that national team players' loyalty lie with U.S.

Soccer above WPS given the greater stability of the national team, the higher pay for players,

and the visibility and possible sponsor dollars that came with national team affiliation. Tensions

between U.S. Soccer and WPS revolved around player loyalty, in addition to scheduling snafus.

Finally, all WPS teams encountered operations limitations based on the location of their

practice and game day fields. As I mentioned earlier, the Chicago WPS team had experienced

both financial difficulties and social tensions based on their location at Toyota Park. For the

Momentum, stadium constraints also existed. When team owner Steve decided to own a WPS

team, he had scoured the metropolitan area for available soccer fields. He had rejected much of

the available playing space on the basis that it was too far from his preferred target market of

suburban families. Ultimately, Steve partnered with a university I call here the University of

Bankworth, a suburban public four-year university, to build a new soccer stadium near the

university. This placed the team about forty-five minutes north of the city center. The stadium

received quite a bit of media attention as the first soccer-specific stadium for women in U.S.

history. The league promoted the stadium's construction heavily as evidence of the growth and

viability of women's professional soccer. In fact, my perceptions of the Momentum before

entering the field revolved largely around their new stadium. Although Steve had contributed

money to construction, the stadium was owned by the University of Bankworth, with the

Momentum on contract to use the stadium during the WPS season. Although I did not know this

when I first entered the field, the University of Bankworth had a long-term plan to turn the

stadium into a football stadium for the team it hoped to field in the coming years. The

relationship between Steve and the University of Bankworth was at times contentious over issues

of stadium management, security requirements, and scheduling.

Table 2 presents an organizational chart of Momentum staff, based on my experiences as

a staff member. There were approximately 58 individuals attached to the team: 15 of these were

only loosely tied to the team, including game day volunteers who often only volunteered once

and infrequent staff such as the team's massage therapist and the game day announcer. I counted

11 interns, including myself. All but 3 of us were undergraduate college students who only

worked over the summer. Most of the college interns were sport business majors looking to gain

experience in the sport field. The two women who worked under media manager Grace were out

of college. Because of our age and our more permanent positioning with the team, Carolyn,

Samantha and I were senior interns who were sometimes asked to manage other interns. In

addition to 22 players, there were 10 paid office staff.

While my hierarchy of paid staff does map closely along the lines of the authority vested

in formal job titles, it does not do so perfectly. Ticketing manager Chris, for instance, held the

same level of formal decision making power as both Jordan and Grace, as well as his ticketing

colleague Kendall. However, Chris occupied a higher social positioning than the three women.

He had a closer personal relationship with Steve, the team owner, and his opinion was solicited

by Steve more often. He was given more time to speak in team meetings and somewhat more

leeway to decide on ticketing initiatives compared to Kendall.

TABLE 2
HIERARCHY AT THE MOMENTUM

Steve (Owner, General Manager)

Rich (CFO, Assistant Coach)
Kelsey (Assistant General Manager/Stadium Manager)
Sasha (Consultant)

Chris (Ticket Sales)
Larry (Head Coach)

Sandra (Office Manager)

Jordan (Corporate Partners and Community Programs)
Grace (Media)
Kendall (Ticket Sales)

Players (N= 22)

Interns (N= 11)

Infrequent Staff (N~ 5)

Game Day Volunteers (N~ 10)

Table 2 shows that the Momentum possessed a clearly gendered hierarchy. While there

were equal numbers of men and women on the paid office staff (with 5 men and 5 women), men

predominated in positions of authority. Steve, Rich, Sasha, Larry and Chris possessed more power over the direction of the team and its work than did Kelsey, Jordan, Grace, Kendall and Sandra. Kelsey, the Assistant General Manager, occupied a unique social position within the team. While her job title gave her substantial authority and oversight, she was simultaneously the manager of operations at the team's stadium. Her office was located in the stadium, which separated her physically and socially from the rest of the staff. Kelsey did not see much of the daily work of other staff and did not always attend staff meetings. As General Manager, Steve decided what about the staff's work Kelsey needed to know about and weigh in on.

In summary, I began this research project from the perspective of my own personal fandom of women's soccer, as well as my experience playing the sport from a young age. The three decades since my birth witnessed the expansion of girls' and women's participation in sport, evidence of a growing cultural acceptance of female athleticism. Still, the gender transformation of sport remains uneven and, along some measures, stalled. Continuing gender disparities exist in terms of representation and resource allocation. In addition, women remain symbolically marginalized in sport through dominant discourse that ties sporting prowess to hegemonic masculinity and the supposed biological superiority of the male body. One indicator of continuing gender inequality is the persistent failure of women's professional team sport leagues. With men's college and professional Big Three leagues firm in comprising the "institutional core" of sport (Messner, 2007), women have yet to gain a lasting foothold at the most elite level of competition. Beyond merely documenting failure, however, I wanted to know *how* and *why* women's professional leagues fail. I wanted to understand the types of challenges that such leagues face over time, as well as how such challenges are perceived and responded to.

I approach the question of women's professional sport through the lens of the internal workings of women's sport organizations. Greater delineation of the interactions and decision making processes that occur internally to sport teams sheds light on the construction and negotiation of gender inequality in contemporary sport. Without an understanding of struggle from the perspective of women's sport organizations themselves, popular narratives around the failure of women's leagues hold that while perhaps disheartening, failure is unsurprising given women's physical inferiority to men and assumed low levels of interest in their play. The goal of my study is to challenge this dominant narrative through explaining the challenges women's sport leagues face. This is an explicitly feminist project in that I highlight the mechanisms through which women's sport leagues are marginalized in hopes that they may be challenged.

To this end, I spent 11 months embedded with one women's professional soccer team, the Momentum, as an unpaid staff member. I observed the daily operations of the team. I interviewed 55 individuals tied to the league as players, staff, season ticket holders, media, and sponsors. I collected countless media articles on the league, and followed social media closely. I grew to understand how women's soccer stakeholders understood the types of challenge the league faced and crafted selling and marketing strategies in an effort to survive. Ultimately, this work was unable to prevent the league's demise in early 2012. Rather than simply calling WPS a failure, however, I present its story here as an example of 21st century gender contestation in sport. This is the story of the many people so dedicated to furthering the careers of female athletes that they tackled the status quo in professional sport head on. Before I get to this story, though, I situate my research on WPS within the larger body of scholarship on gender and sport. The following chapter takes up this theme.

III.   THEORY AND EPISTEMOLOGY

A.   <u>**Gender and Sport**</u>

In this chapter, I situate my research within studies of gender and inequality in sport sociology. I argue that studies of gender and sport have commonly been located at either the micro level of the experiences of female athletes or at the macro level of societal institutions, such as law. The meso level of interaction within organizations is rarely considered in analyses of women's sport, a gap important to fill given the centrality of formal organizations in shaping sport experience. I approach this gap using gendered organizations theory and the institutional logics perspective from the new institutionalism in organization studies. I show that ethnography is appropriate to study women's sport organizations from these theoretical lenses, as I am able to focus on social interactions over time. Finally, I detail the interpretive epistemology that underlies ethnography.

Beyond play or entertainment, sport simultaneously reflects and constructs the society in which it is embedded. In particular, sport is a key site for the social construction of gender. Sport has been a central institution in the contemporary construction of gender because modern sport remains central to the formation and dominance of hegemonic masculinities (Connell, 1995). Historical analyses by sport sociologists have documented how modern sport organizations emerged in part to "shore up" white, middle class heteromasculinity given the fears of social feminization that accompanied a variety of social and economic changes in the 19th and 20th centuries (Dworkin and Messner, 1999; Guttman, 1978; Kimmel, 1990; 2005; Markovits and Hellerman, 2001; Markovits and Albertson, 2012; Messner, 2007; Theberge, 1997).

In the mid-19th century, rapid industrialization, the increased mechanization of labor, the rising populations of cities, increased immigration, and the early women's movement were perceived to threaten a dominant masculinity organized around physical labor (Kimmel, 2005). A century later, the twin shifts of women's increasing entrée into the public sphere during WWII and the decreasing availability of jobs based around physical labor in the decades after the war contributed to men's renewed perception that their dominant social position was in jeopardy. Throughout this time period, men's ability to demonstrate male superiority through the twin pillars of physical strength and workforce participation eroded. In context of these new "crises of masculinity" (Kimmel, 2005), organized sport was one way for men to symbolically assert their physical superiority over women. Messner notes that, "Sport was a male-created homosocial cultural sphere that provided men with a psychological separation from the perceived feminization of society while also providing dramatic symbolic proof of the 'natural superiority' of men over women" (2007, p. 35).

Michael Kimmel (2005) argues that the destabilization of white, heterosexual masculinity throughout the 19th and 20th centuries was responded to through a new cultural doctrine of physicality and an increasing disciplining of the male body. As part of this doctrine, organized sport emerged out of a belief that "sports would create young men imbued with the attributes of physical, moral, and spiritual fitness" (Kimmel, 2005, p. 50). As one example, Kimmel demonstrates how the popularity of organized baseball skyrocketed in the 1880s as part of an institution-building project designed explicitly to revitalize masculinity. "Baseball," Kimmel argues, "became one of the central mechanisms by which masculinity was reconstituted at the turn of the century" (2005, p. 53). From its inception, then, modern men's sport organizations have been integral to the construction of hegemonic masculinity and male dominance. The "Big

Four" of men's baseball, football, basketball, and ice hockey continue to be important to the construction of culturally dominant masculinities (Anderson, 2008; Sands, 2002).

In the past several decades, women have made significant gains in sports participation at the recreational level and in educational settings, such as collegiate sport. Mass increases in the numbers of girls and women participating in sport at all levels have occurred despite the longstanding equation of "athlete" with "maleness," and pose real challenge to the masculine power structure within sport (Caudwell, 2003; Messner, 2007). Sport has increasingly become a resource girls and women use to construct gendered and sexual identities, build relationships with other women, and variously negotiate and/or challenge the supposed incompatibility of physical activity with femininity and womanhood (Adams and Bettis, 2003; Azzarito, 2010; Barker-Ruchti and Tinning, 2010; Broad, 2001; Caudwell, 2003; Cooky and McDonald, 2005; Crosset, 1995; Ezzell, 2009; George, 2005; Grindstaff and West, 2006; Hanis-Martin, 2006; Ross and Shinew, 2008; Theberge, 1997; 2000). New feminine subjectivities organized around physical competition and athletic prowess have emerged in tandem with increases in girls and women's sport participation in the past several decades, newly reworked definitions of femininity exhibited by groups of young women Azzarito (2010) calls "alpha girls" (see also Adams and Bettis, 2003; Clark, 2012).

For sport to retain its associations with maleness and masculinity in this new context, women must be excluded or marginalized, the boundaries around sport continually policed and (re)solidified. The history of this policing shows sport to be "contested terrain in which gender is being constructed in complex and often contradictory ways" (Messner, 2007, p. 4). Powerful sporting institutions, as well as media, have found a variety of ways to reassert the "essential masculinity" of sport in the face of women's increased participation and demands for equality.

Female athletes are variously excluded, marginalized, trivialized, or devalued, especially as placed in comparison to men's sports and male athletes (Messner, 2002). Oftentimes, they are ignored. For instance, Messner and Cooky (2010) found that from 2004-2010, evening news coverage of women's sport *decreased,* with female athletes receiving 1.6% of airtime. The story of women's sport in television and media is not only one of sexualization or trivialization, but also one of deafening silence (see also Adams and Tuggle, 2004).

Sport is so strongly linked to contemporary gender inequality because it is one of the last existing social institutions within which sex segregation is entirely naturalized and legitimized (Anderson, 2008; Davis and Weaving, 2010). With the exception of certain youth sports played by young children or co-recreational leagues for adults, sports institutions at all levels of play separate men and women under the rationale of "sex difference" in physical and athletic ability. Sports are built upon assumptions of sexual difference (Caudwell, 2003; Crawley, Foley, and Shehan, 2008). Sociologists have long decried the focus on sexual difference to the exclusion of similarity, demonstrating that men and women are much more similar in their physical capabilities than different (Kane, 1995). Given perceived binary sex difference between men and women, female athletes' capabilities and accomplishments are often neglected or even derogated. This often takes the form of comparing women's accomplishments to men's (Messner, 2002; Theberge, 1997; 2000). In assuming that *all* women are physically inferior to *all* men, sex segregation becomes a protectionist rationale. Yet the logic of protecting women from the injuries that would be sure to come from playing with men falls apart rather easily. If our sports system does not restrict the smallest and most physically weak boys and men from participation against their larger, stronger, peers, why exclude girls and women who may be equally or more capable as many men? In fact, the American court system frequently put forth

just such arguments in opening up many so-called "contact sports" to girls' participation from the 1970s to the 1990s (Fields, 2005). Systemic and pervasive sex segregation in sport, then, reinforces ideologies of sexual difference and female athletic inferiority (Anderson, 2008).

B.   **Studying Women's Sport**

A major contradiction in contemporary sport is the coexistence of high rates of girls' and women's sport participation with continuing gender inequality in sport leadership, media coverage, and the distribution of financial resources, among other measures. In fact, a sizeable body of literature has traced the mechanisms through which unequal outcomes are constructed and maintained in sport. One body of research has studied gender inequality through the lens of the cultural meanings surrounding the female athlete, as well as the ways in which systems of meaning are created and disseminated within mass media (Barker-Ruchti and Tinnings, 2010; Billings et al., 2006; Buysse and Embser-Herbert, 2004; Christopherson, Janning, and McConnell, 2002; Dart, 2009; Heywood and Dworkin, 2003; Kian, Mondello, and Vincent, 2009; Schultz, 2004). A plethora of studies have also examined the meanings of sports participation for girls and women (Adams and Bettis, 2003; Broad, 2001; Caudwell, 2003; Cooky and McDonald, 2005; Cox and Thompson, 2000; 2001; Ezzell, 2009; George, 2005; Harris, 2005; Ross and Shinew, 2008).

The influence of cultural studies in sport sociology has resulted in a strong emphasis on systems of cultural meaning and processes of articulation, or the social connection of previously disparate elements (Andrews, 2002). While cultural studies embraces a wide range of methodologies, its application to the study of women in sport has translated into a focus on individuals. Prior attention to women's sport has been almost exclusively focused at the level of female athletes' individual or group-based experience. One major focus of the literature on

women's sport has been the "female athlete paradox" – women's participation in a societal realm defined as masculine. Specifically, many studies research female athletes' negotiations and definitions of gender and sexuality given that sport remains an ideologically male domain (Broad, 2001; Caudwell, 2003; Cox and Thompson, 2000; Ezzell, 2009; George, 2005; Krane et al., 2004; Ross and Shinew, 2008; Theberge, 1997). As women's participation in sport at all levels has increased substantially in recent decades, it remains an interesting and important task to document the complex variety of strategies athletes use to reconcile competing demands of sport and femininity in unique sporting contexts. In some cases, scholars have found that women do not perceive their athleticism to exist in competition with self-defined femininity, and use sport to directly challenge the boundaries of heterosexual womanhood (Broad, 2001; Krane, 2001; Krane et al., 2011). These studies highlight the agency of women in challenging the constraints of dominant cultural constructions as they construct identities and practices in sport. However, few of these studies locate athletes within the organizational contexts they occupy as they negotiate cultural contradictions. This is a particularly notable flaw given that the vast majority of all sport experience today takes place within the bounds of formal organizations. An analysis of women's sport organizations promises to further contextualize the struggles of elite female athletes. Such an analysis also shifts our focus beyond athletes to also comprise those who build and sell the careers of female athletes. Too often, these important social actors have been left behind the scenes, very literally, in research on women's sport.

My study also takes the study of gender and sport beyond a focus on the experiences of gender, racial, and sexual minorities in sport. The rare literature on sport as organization commonly adopts a "business case for diversity" approach that posits diverse work groups to be positively related to organizational outcomes (Cunningham, 2008). From this perspective, sport

organizations are important sites for workplace practices that may exclude or marginalize women and racial and sexual minorities. While this line of research is important to challenge the predominance of white, heterosexual men in positions of decision-making in sport, it rarely spotlights the social organization of work beyond practices and structures that impact the career trajectories of minority employees. In addition, very little of this organizational research focuses on women's sport specifically.

Other research departs from the individual-level focus of the "female athlete paradox" and "diversity" literatures by identifying macro-level societal institutions as key contributors to women's disadvantage in sport. This research trajectory explores the interlocking nature of large scale social institutions in shaping the construction of gender in sport. Two examples will suffice to sketch this theme. Love and Kelly (2011) examine all judicial decisions in legal cases brought by boys requesting to play on high school girls' sport teams given the lack of boys' teams in a particular sport. Through these cases, which span the 1970s through 2006, the American legal system has established a precedent of denying boys access to girls teams. Judicial precedent on this point emerged out of belief in binary sex, girls' uniform physical inferiority to boys, and a focus on biology as the central cause of sex-related performance gaps, rather than social or historical factors such as training or resources. That women's supposed biological disadvantage has been built into law, the authors argue, demonstrates that "the gendered nature of institutions becomes mutually reinforcing as sport and law rely on ideologies of inferiority and put these ideas into practice via organization policy" (Love and Kelly, 2011, p. 244).

As a second example demonstrating linkages between sport, medicine, and sport governance, sex segregation has recently come to the public forefront in discussions of sex-testing policies of international sport organizing bodies. While the case of Caster Semenya, a

South African runner subjected to a lengthy process of sex verification in 2010, drew significant media and public attention, more recent work has critically analyzed sex-testing policies adopted by the International Association of Athletic Federations (IAAF) and International Olympic Committee (IOC) that regulate "appropriate" androgen levels for female athletes. As critics of sex testing in sport note, the perceived need for such testing policies stems from a binary understanding of sex, as well as assumptions of uniform male biological superiority, social ideas about the body that have little biological backing. That male athletes and female-to-male (FTM) transgender athletes are not subject to sex verification tests is evidence of the strength of binary, androcentric ideas about sex and gender. Not only do these policies stem from a two-sex logic, but serve to actively reinforce and police such logic, despite ongoing debate around how to measure and capture biological sex for women athletes (Karkazis et al., 2012; Sullivan, 2011). Although couched in the language of "fair play," sport is never truly a level playing field given that elite athletes rise to the top of their sports precisely *because* they are physically unique. In context of an inherently tilted playing field, sex testing maintains women's inferiority in face of their substantial challenge to male dominance in sport in the past half century; Sullivan argues that, "It is clear that the aim is to keep the binary classification system intact although there is mounting evidence and growing recognition of the diversity of human sex and gender identities" (2011, p. 414). In addition, the markers used to identify athletes for testing have more to do with sociocultural notions of appropriate gender display for women rather than biology, assuming congruence between the body and social behavior which has long been debunked by science. Karkazis and colleagues write that, "It is troubling that more than half of the indicators identified by the IAAF policy to determine which female athletes should undergo sex testing are entangled with deeply subjective and stereotypical Western definitions of femininity" (Karkazis et al.,

2012, p. 13).

Ann Travers (2005) takes up this macro-level focus on intersecting social institutions in identifying a multi-institution, intersecting "sport nexus" that marginalizes women and gay, lesbian, queer, and intersex athletes. In Travers' formulation, the institutionalization of the two-sex system and celebration of hegemonic masculinity across sport, media, economy, medicine, law, and technology construct gendered and sexual structures of dominance.

While Travers' work is meant to be an analytic, and not empirical, recounting of sport and gender and sexual inequality, and she has certainly identified two building blocks of inequality in sport and beyond, her focus on the "sport nexus" implies that the linkages between institutional sites are fixed in such a way as to continually assure women's domination in almost automatic fashion. To say that the institutionalized two-sex system and ritual construction and celebration of hegemonic masculinity marginalize women, queer, and non-gender conforming athletes, is to ignore that ideologies only become institutionalized through the practices of people who are situated and make decisions about the world. To say that the "sport nexus" marginalizes women is to neglect that actors within the nexus are located very differently, and may take up or reject ideologies as they act in their daily lives. While the concept of the sport nexus calls attention to real material and symbolic links across institutions, it gives inadequate attention to moments where ideologies around sex, gender, and sexuality are not taken up, but are rejected, transformed, or negotiated. If the institutionalization of ideologies around masculinity and the body produce male dominance in sport, how are these ideas sustained over time among diverse persons across social and physical space?

While the limits of research on female athletes are located in an exclusive, oftentimes

a-contextual individual-level focus on gender and identity, research at the macro level tends to overstate the extent to which contemporary institutional arrangements are fixed, particularly as they shape the larger gender order of sport. What is almost entirely absent from the literature in gender and sport, with few exceptions (see Hanis-Martin, 2006; Hoeber, 2007; Knoppers and Anthonissen, 2003; McKay, 1997; Theberge, 2000), is the meso level of organizations as sites of action. This is an important gap given that most experience of sport is nested within formal organizations that are diverse in terms of geographic location, demographic composition, rule and oversight structures, and power hierarchies, as well as the cultural symbols used to signify meaning and order. There is also substantial evidence that male dominance in sport reflects the overwhelming cultural and financial significance of a small, specific subset of male sport organizations. I argue here for an analysis of women's sport that goes beyond the level of individual player experience to highlight the organizational contexts in which struggles over sport take place.

This argument is in line with contemporary gender theories in sociology that are integrative and multi-level, positing gender as a societal structure above and beyond individual experience and identity (Risman, 1998; 2004). Not only is gender experienced individually, it is built into the structure of societal institutions, and operates through group practice in daily interaction. The level of interaction within formal organizations has been theorized as central to the ongoing construction of gender inequality, as available cultural repertoires (what Martin calls gender practices) are invoked in the interactive daily construction of gender (Martin, 2003; 2006). Risman's multi-level gender structure theory is an analytic tool that allows questions of power and change to move to the forefront of empirical research; the question of when agency is

reproductive or *resistant* of current gender social relations (Messner, 2007) can be explored within the complex interplay of multiple levels of analysis (individual, interactional, and institutional).

The current study of women's soccer takes up gender structure theory as a framing heuristic. Approaching women's soccer as an organization necessitates multi-level theory, as individuals work together on a daily basis within a context of organizational norms and formal structures, as well as extra-organizational pressures. Those individuals tied to women's soccer, including players, coaches, owners, staff, and fans, came to the league in 2009 with unique backgrounds and existing identities. Both social background and identity were certainly salient to the formation of organizational structure and policy as it was decided by each team owner or ownership group. Momentum owner Steve, for instance, decided to act as owner and General Manager out of a belief that his background in business gave him the necessary knowledge and skills to manage a soccer team. However, women's soccer stakeholders also interacted and made decisions collectively given their organization's location in the larger field of professional sport in the U.S. Their positioning within this field determined the configuration of macro-level social institutions and structures that directly impacted how individuals understood their work and shared these understandings with others. Employing gender structure theory, my ethnographic study connects individual background and daily interaction with the larger institutional and structural contexts in which the league operated.

C.   **Sport in Organization Studies**

Traditionally, sport scholars and organization scholars have had little to say to one another (Theodoraki and Henry, 1994; Washington and Patterson, 2011; Wolfe et al., 2005). This lack of dialogue may be traced in part to efforts of sport sociologists to combat perceptions of

sport as trivial or superfluous by emphasizing the utility of sport research to sport teams and the theoretical importance of sport settings. As Slack and Kikulis acknowledge,

> "The sociology of sport, as a relatively young sub-discipline, has sought to demonstrate its "practical relevance" and produce empirical work of interest to coaches and physical educators. Alternatively, it has sought to demonstrate its sociological relevance by addressing the central questions of sociological theory. As a result, a lack of work in the study of organizations has been reflected in our field" (1989, p. 180).

The paucity of studies of sport using an organizational lens is also a result of the gradual movement of organization studies from sociology to the field of business and management. While organizational theorizing has increasingly moved out of sociology, sport studies remains more highly tied to sociology. What focus on organizations does exist within sport studies is assumed to be the purview of sport management. However, sport management tends to treat questions of organizational efficiency, with an applied, often a-theoretical focus.

Despite minimal existing overlap between sport and organization studies, recent scholars have pointed to the promise that a merging of these areas portends in building both theoretical and empirical knowledge. Wolfe et al. (2005) make the case that "Sport has proved to be an effective setting for studying a number of organizational phenomena" (2005, p. 185). While studies of single sport organizations may not be generalizable to other organization types, sport organizations do have unique features that make them useful for theory construction. For example, sport organizations often collect vast amounts of data over time. The wealth of quantitative data in sport presents unique opportunities for analysis. In addition, as multi-level entities with individuals nested in teams and teams nested in leagues, sport organizations foster the application of multi-level theorizing. And sport organizations are rich sites for studying the relationships between an organization and its environment, broadly defined, because of the clear, strong pressures that sport organizations face from external sources. As Wolfe et al. note, "In

sport, organizations at the team and league levels of analysis face various, acute selection pressures. Professional teams and leagues face serious challenges in the areas of attendance, television viewership, rapidly increasing expenses, viability of small-market teams, and problematic behaviors off the field of play, to list a few" (2005, p.196). As a theory of organizations and their environments, institutional theory is highly applicable to the case of sport. In a recent review of organizational theory and sport, Washington and Patterson conclude that "Sports provide a rich empirical setting to elaborate and illuminate some of the basic tenets of institutional theory" (2011, p. 2).

The promise of merging sport and organization studies also extends to the question of social inequalities. While a burgeoning literature examines the construction of gender in sport organizations, this work commonly adopts a "women in management" framework that stresses the experiences and perceptions of individual women over the organizational processes and structures that impact their work (Washington and Patterson, 2011). Studies of how gender and race shape organizational processes in sport setting have been identified as an area ripe for future research, as "Organization scholars rarely incorporate the sport literature on gender and diversity into their work" (Wolfe et al., 2005, p. 204).

I argue that pushing forward knowledge on contemporary women's sporting experience necessitates connecting individuals and institutions through the lens of interaction internal to organizational settings. A focus on collective interaction in organizations calls attention to individual- and interactional-level processes as embedded within, but also shaping, larger institutional constructions. Responding to recent calls for the greater integration of sport studies and organizational theory, as well as studies of gender in sport organizations (Washington and Patterson, 2011; Wolfe et al., 2005), my study of women's soccer integrates two distinct strands

of organizational theory with sport studies. Specifically, my approach analyzes the interactions of a variety of differently located stakeholders using gendered organizations theory and the institutional logics perspective in organization studies.

D. **The Institutional Logics Perspective**

The past three decades have witnessed the growing influence of a "brash new theoretical perspective" in organizational sociology (Scott, 2008b). Scholarship traditionally explained decision making in organizations with reference to economic or technological structures at the macro level or to individual-level cognitive schema. New institutionalism moved beyond a focus on resource environments and mental models to explore the ways in which societal institutions shape the formal structures and workings of organizations. The new institutionalism offers a broad conception of "environment," including the influence of culture and ideology. One branch of new institutionalism, the institutional logics perspective, stresses the influence of societal-level cultural logics that call actors' attention to particular organizational problems and solutions (Thornton, 2004).

Institutional logics "provide the organizing principles for a field. They are the basis of taken-for-granted rules guiding behaviour of field-level actors, and they refer to the belief systems and related practices that predominate in an organizational field" (Reay and Hinings, 2009, p. 629). Logics provide individuals with a set of motivations for action and that can be taken up, elaborated, challenged, or discarded. While logics may constrain action in that they provide guidelines for behavior, the inherent contradictions between logics open agency to individuals who must necessarily decide how to navigate competing demands. In the form of logics, culture is understood to be a source of strategic action and change as it impacts both cognitive schema and organizational structures. A central goal of this perspective has been to

elucidate the mechanisms through which organizational decision making has been shaped by cultural logics.

In contrast to early institutional theory, which focused predominantly on stability and isomorphic trends across organizations, recent research has shown that organizations are often subject to competing environmental demands that are not easily, or stably, resolved (Lounsbury, 2007). Lounsbury (2007) argues that environments are not characterized by a single logic that is stable and dominant – rather, logic dominance is never total, and is always contested and subject to change. Change does not emanate from "exogenous shocks," but is a common feature of ongoing contestation within and between fields and organizations (Fligstein and McAdams, 2012).

Although organizational responses to their environments are not uniform nor conflict-free, neither are they wholly arbitrary or unstructured. Recent work in the new institutionalist tradition has focused on delineating both types of organizational response to external forces, as well as those factors which influence the direction of such responses. In fact, "The ways and extent to which organizations responded to institutional pressures [has become] itself a subject of study" (Scott 2008a, p. 432). The successful integration of logics in organizational practice has been tied to greater effectiveness, sustainability and growth for organizations. However, competing logics can also create conflict and may produce undesirable outcomes for an organization (Almandoz, 2012). New studies explore the contextual factors that impact how logics are balanced, as well as the outcomes related to logic integration or competition.

Delbridge and Edwards' (2013) study of super yacht construction shows that the melding of market, engineering and design logics occurred differently according to individuals' location within industry power and authority structures. Dunn and Jones' (2010) study on medical

education shows that the balance of science and care logics was impacted by the shifting power of those groups who centrally adopted one or the other logic. Logic balance is commonly achieved via loose coupling, or adopting elements of environmental demand into formal structure, but not daily practice. Another response is hybridity, or adopting structures and/or practices from multiple sources of pressure. Pache and Santos (2010) study a group of organizations in France tasked with reintegrating the long-term unemployed into the labor market. Embedded within both social welfare and market logics, these organizations became hybrid by strategically adopting practices from each of the logics. Similarly, Glynn and Lounsbury's (2005) study of critics' reviews of the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra show how critics simultaneously incorporated a degree of emergent market logic into their reviews over time while reasserting the importance of aesthetic logic and the traditional canon. A third documented method of balance is strategic collaboration. For instance, Reay and Hinings (2009) argue that dual institutional logics have been at play within Canadian health care for 13 years. They explore the micro-level mechanisms by which these logics (medical professionalism and market) coexist long-term, and how, in fact, the two camps embracing these logics worked together collaboratively at times. One strategy was a separation between "medical" and "financial" decisions, which gave doctors and RHA boards different spheres of influence. Over time, RHA boards increasingly sought informal input from doctors, and the two groups collaborated at strategic moments both in response to government action and within sites of experiment.

The institutional logics perspective has been critiqued on the basis that as a macro cultural concept, logics present as determinative of action, leaving inadequate space for agency, and ignoring the micro-foundations of new institutional theory. As Hallett describes, this strain

of theory "has been criticized for creating a metaphysical pathos, where institutions are disembodied structures acting on their own volition and actors are powerless and inert in the face of inexorable social forces'' (Hallett, 2010, p. 66-67). In contrast, Hallett and colleagues have put forth an "inhabited institutions" framework that seeks to reintegrate agency through a renewed focus on interaction. Building on the ethnomethodological microfoundations of institutional theory, this new theoretical perspective spotlights meaning making among multiple stakeholders in interaction as central to how larger cultural logics impact organizational structures and practices. While not denying that macro logics exist within organizational fields, Hallett (2010) argues that these logics are interpreted dynamically by persons through interaction, and in ways that are not easily predicted. People may be "carriers" of larger logics, but responses to these logics are constructed relationally. Institutions, then, and their influence, are only felt and experienced inside social interaction. The social order, although it may seem stable or static, is constructed through a process of interaction and interpersonal agreement. Interactions take place in structures of constraint and agency. Logics are not neatly or uniformly taken up and embraced, but may also be revised or challenged. Hallett and Ventresca argue, "Although institutions penetrate organizations, it is through social interaction that institutions are interpreted and modified as people coordinate the activities that propel institutions forward" (2006, p. 215). Organizational ethnography is particularly conducive to this approach, because ethnographers can see local meaning and extra-local meaning at work daily within interaction.

As an example of empirical research in this vein, Binder (2007) studies private sector social service organizations, exploring the question of how members of different departments understand organizational goals and practices given new funding streams from government. Responses to this new environmental context were multiple given that individuals were located

within different areas of the organization, and also within different systems of meaning external to the organization. Binder argues that, "These locally situated people engage not in automatic script following, but in what Mary Douglas calls bricolage, combining and recombining already available and legitimate concepts, scripts, models, and other cultural artifacts that they find around them in their institutional environment. We must look to people's creativity at the local level, as well as at the 'rules of the game' to understand how organizations work" (2007, p. 568).

From the institutional logics strand of theorizing, I take up the notion that organizational environments often produce conflicting imperatives, and that tensions are negotiated in complex ways. From recent work on inhabited institutions, I take up the focus on interaction as crucial to both the construction and negotiation of institutional logics.

E.   **Institutional Theory in Sport Settings**

What little research does apply institutional theory to sport organizations comes from the pioneering work of Trevor Slack and colleagues (Cousens and Slack, 2005; Hinings et al., 1996; Slack and Hinings, 1994; Slack and Kikulis, 1989; Slack and Parent, 2006; Slack, 1994). Reflecting the dominance of isomorphic analyses in early new institutional work, a major focus of Slack's research has been on processes whereby sport organizations become more attuned to their environments and more similar to one another. In a study of values within Canadian sport organizations, Hinings et al. write that, "Organizations have to adapt to societal and sectoral values about their appropriate roles and forms. Institutionally prescribed and legitimated values about appropriate ways of operating are a constraint on the choice of organizational arrangements" (1996, p. 889). In a similar vein, Slack and Hinings' (1994) study of the same Canadian sport organizations shows that pressures toward greater professionalism and

bureaucratization produced greater professionalism in organizational structure across organizations throughout the 1980s. However, not all elements of these organizations changed to the same extent, evidence of resistance to change. Specifically, volunteer systems did not change much over time, indicating a degree of resistance to letting go of volunteer control over the organizations' direction. While conformity would have given these organizations greater access to financial resources from the state, such change would have meant a loss of autonomy, particularly for volunteers in what had traditionally been volunteer-run organizations.

The most recent application of institutional logics theory to sport comes from Cousens and Slack's (2005) study of North American men's professional sport leagues between 1970 and 1997. They document a shift in the dominant institutional logic organizing professional sport during this time period, from "league dominance" to "corporate dominance." This logic shift took place as the number of cable television networks skyrocketed post-1970s deregulation. Sport organizations' major source of revenue shifted from ticket sales to television contacts, with concomitant growth in partnerships with corporations. Growing rates of corporate interlock across leagues, in particular, encouraged men's sport leagues to become more like one another in their practices and structures. For instance, men's basketball, football, and baseball have all taken up the linguistic shift from "sponsorship," a term indicating a contractual relationship between independent entities, to "corporate partnership," a term hinting at a long term integrative partnership. This logic shift resulted in men's leagues understanding themselves as located in a corporate entertainment field revolving around the promotion of celebrity culture, new production values, the construction of new corporate facilities, and relocation of teams toward wealthier, bigger markets. Cousens and Slack conclude that, "In the 1980s and 1990s, new strategies were adopted in the areas of labor relations, broadcasting, marketing, league parity,

and growth that differed markedly from those employed in the early 1970s. These strategies were underpinned by shifts in the beliefs and institutional logics of action of league and franchise leaders that evolved in concert with the changing context in which these firms were embedded" (2005, p. 14).

F.   **Gendered Organizations Theory**

While recent literature highlights the ways organizations are characterized by multiple, often competing logics, and resolve resultant tensions in myriad ways, this literature does not engage with another influential strand of organizational scholarship – gendered organizations theory. Beginning in the 1970's, feminist scholars called attention to the absence of gender within organizational theory through the development of new theories and research agendas. Such scholarship was a response to several related trends in the sociological study of organizations – the marginalization of female theorists, the exclusion of women's experiences in organizational theory and research, and the supposed gender neutrality of formal organizational (often work) settings. Rather than a neutral, gender-free site onto which gender is brought, purportedly by women, feminist scholars reconceptualized organizations as pervaded by gender at multiple levels. Early work focused on women's experiences in male-dominated occupations.

This perspective was pushed beyond a focus on women in the 1990s following publication of both Joan Acker (1990) and Sylvia Gherardi (1994). Joan Acker's 1990 article is a seminal iteration of "gendered organizations" theory. She argues that organization structures, practices and processes are central to the production and maintenance of gender inequality. Gender is constitutive of organizational structures, such as job requirements, formal rules, and systems of evaluation. Numerous studies have shown that what appear to be gender-neutral

structures or processes within organizations reflect male standards and definitions; what is "male" is often defined within organizations as what is "human" or "natural." Perhaps one of the best known examples of the gendering of organizations has to do with formal structures – jobs are often conceived of as gender-neutral slots, whereas job requirements reflect a male "ideal" worker with few to no responsibilities outside of work (Acker, 1990). As a later example, Acker (1998) demonstrated how the ethos of "non-responsibility" for reproduction and caretaking which pervades all capitalist, for-profit organizations further solidifies the opposition between "worker" and "caretaker," and makes work life difficult for people – most often women – who have significant responsibility for caretaking.

Similarly, Gherardi (1994) argues that beyond structure, organizational cultures and practices are gendered. Although doing gender in organizations, as West and Zimmerman (1987) hold, is pervasive and ubiquitous, its practice is also elusive and often ambiguous. Specifically, Gherardi argues that the gendering of organizational culture becomes invisible to members through processes of individualization that portray organizational practices as gender-neutral. She argues, "Although participants may believe they express purely personal tastes and inclinations, knowledge of what matches and what clashes with the organization's style – as well as with a particular occupational community inside it – is an organizational fact. It is organizationally bound up with what 'fits' the attributes of male and female – as individuals, as work roles, as organizational roles, as activities, as competencies" (1994, p. 594).

In an overview of gendered organizations theory, Britton (2000) asks what it means to say that an organization, or a component thereof, is "gendered." Britton lists three possibilities. First, bureaucratic, capitalist organizations are *inherently* gendered by design and structure, with a binary male-female distinction at their structural core. Such foundational

difference inevitably recreates inequality given the unequal value allotted to masculine and feminine. Second, organizations may be male- or female-dominated; an organization may be "gendered" in terms of its sex composition. Third, organizations may be pervaded by discourses of hegemonic masculinities, although the masculine nature of discourse is often masked as gender-neutral, as Acker (1990) Gherardi (1994) note.

Subsequent empirical research has highlighted each of the three ways that organizations are gendered, as well as the linkages between the three, as organizational sex ratios articulate with both structure and discourse. Important to my analysis here, empirical work has focused on the ways that discourses circulating within organizations often contain gendered meanings. This is particularly true for sport organizations, as the larger field of U.S. sport continues to be culturally defined around masculinity (Anderson, 2009; Messner, 2009; 2007). For instance, multiple studies have found a conflation between traditionally masculine characteristics, such as verbal and physical aggression, and perceptions of competence within sport organizations. The value assigned to masculinity is one mechanism that propels men into coaching and leadership positions over women, and alienates female candidates and employees (Anderson, 2009; Shaw and Hoeber, 2003; Shaw and Slack, 2002).

Compared to new institutional research, gendered organizations theory continues to be grounded in a focus on interaction, reflecting both the salience of West and Zimmerman's (1987) "Doing Gender," as well as the recent work of Martin and Poggio on gender practices (Martin, 2001; 2003; 2006; Poggio, 2006). However, one of the central limitations of gendered organizational research is an empirical focus on processes internal to a single organization to the exclusion of processes across multiple organizations or within an organizational field. I suggest that gender does not operate solely within the bounds of a single organization. Rather, as

institutional theory calls attention to, gender is constructed both within and across organizations and at the broader level of organizational fields. From the gendered organizations perspective, I take up the notion that organizations actively construct gender hierarchies through formal structures, work processes, and daily interactions, as well as the sets of ideas that circulate internally. However, this chapter broadens gendered organizations theory by considering how gender in organizations is constructed and negotiated through interactions with logics that stem from embeddedness within local and extra local contexts.

In this analysis, I integrate gendered organizations theory and the institutional logics perspective by spotlighting interaction and group social dynamics internal to the Momentum. Gendered organizations theory has traditionally understood interactional dynamics as emerging within an interplay of individual social identity, informal gender expectations, and the hierarchy internal to a single organizational setting. Institutional theory in organization studies, in contrast, has situated analyses at the macro-level, showing how interaction takes place in wider institutional and field-level contexts. My study blends the two traditions by showing that the interactions between individuals as they decide how to build and sell women's soccer simultaneously reflect individual social location, the formal, codified expectations emerging from organizational structure, the formal expectations emerging from organizations in the field of professional sport, and the informal expectations attached to multiple salient societal institutions, such as gender, feminism, and media. My study foregrounds gender as a societal institution that integrally shapes the operation of organizations. The institutional logics perspective has yet to consider race, gender, or sexuality as multi-level societal structures that impact those logics deemed relevant to a given organization and how logics are taken up, rejected, or revised within practice.

G.   **<u>Interpretive Epistemology</u>**

Epistemologies relate the relationship between researchers and knowledge production. As Joey Sprague argues, an epistemology is a "theory of knowing" that links the knower (the researcher), the known (the object of study), and the process of knowing (2005, p. 32). The long-dominant positive science model of epistemology centered around the supposed objective regularity of social life and the possibility (and desirability) of value-free science. Although it continues to inform empirical research, positive science epistemology has been widely criticized in the social sciences. Not only is science never truly value-free, but the very idea that science could be objective and value-free reflects a particular social location in the world. Epistemologies are products of particular worldviews. As such, epistemologies reflect the power embedded in existing social relationships and structures.

In contrast to the positive science model, interpretive epistemology emphasizes the subjective meaning that underlies action. Taking up an interpretive epistemology entails rejecting the assumptions of objectivity and value neutrality that underpin positive science models. Rather than seeing subjectivity as a "bias" in social research, interpretive epistemologies see all research as comprised of subjectivity. In fact, exploring how subjectivity shapes social research is an important process to analyses of power structures in social settings. All research is "theory laden" (Sprague, 2005) in the sense of being shaped out of background assumptions and research standpoint. While epistemology and method are not congruous, interpretive epistemologies initially emerged in tandem with qualitative methods, and methods such as ethnography and in-depth interviewing are often undergirded by the interpretive approach.

The current study is an ethnography informed by interpretive epistemology. As a qualitative method, ethnography involves intensive, long-term participation in an ongoing social

world. Many ethnographers believe that "doing and feeling first-hand is the best pathway to believing, knowing and theorizing sociologically" (Atkinson, 2011, p. 32). While I do not believe it is necessarily the case that ethnography produces a *better* overall understanding of the social phenomena under study, ethnography does have advantages over other methods. One advantage to ethnography is that it takes seriously the point of view of social actors. Of course, this understanding is constructed by the researcher as, and such, is a presentation of reality emerging out of social location and a particular set of social relationships. Ethnography also has the advantage of challenging the assumptions the researcher brings to the field as we are continually surprised by new practices and conversations. And ethnography highlights the connectedness of social factors within a dense matrix of social structures, interactions, and relationships. Ethnography, and qualitative methods more broadly, have been deemed particularly advantageous to the study of sport. Recent sport scholars have made the case that true understandings of physical cultures are only possible through the participation of researchers in sport itself. A stream of "embodied ethnography" in sport studies has theorized the subjectivity of the body as key to social understanding.

H.   **Feminist Research Methods**

I entered the field conceptualizing my project as an explicitly feminist ethnography. While there is certainly no one definition of feminist research, I defined my research as feminist in its merging of both analytic and political aims. Rather than understanding these as competing goals, my dual aims represent "complementary sides of a feminist coin" (Ezzell, 2013, p. 10). I wanted to understand the struggles around selling women's soccer in service of advancing the growth and sustainability of women's elite sport at the professional level. That I continue to

understand this as a feminist agenda reflects a particular conception of what feminism means for women's sport.

WPS was unabashedly trying to break in to the male-dominated mainstream of professional sport in the U.S. Feminist sport scholars have called attention to the limitations that accompany this goal, including ignorance to ongoing racial, sexual, and class exclusions in sport (including *within* women's sport), as well as an inability to challenge the fundamentally masculinist structures that organize contemporary elite sport. While these are important critiques, I entered the field taking up the goal of mainstreaming, concerned primarily with the ability of WPS to assimilate into the institutional core of professional sport. Why it is that women have not quite broken in to professional team sport in any lasting way?[2] How do individuals within WPS work to build what they hope will be a sustainable league?

Reflexivity means writing the self as researcher into analysis – who the researcher is, how their social location influenced data collection, and how they produced analysis. It is certainly the case that my own understanding of feminism, and its application to sport contexts, is conditioned by my social location. As a white, middle class woman, I was raised with a liberal model of feminism centered around issues of representation and opportunity. This often becomes a "numbers game" model that sees women in positions of power and leadership as the ultimate marker of success. While I acknowledge those critiques levied at this understanding of parity, I remain inclined toward inclusion as one important goal in moving toward greater gender equality in sport. I prefer to move beyond either/or debates around the "appropriate" feminist vision for the gender transformation of sport towards a both/and approach that simultaneously advocates

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[2] Some may point to the Women's National Basketball Association (WNBA) as a success story, given its existence since 1997. The WNBA has certainly made many inroads into professional sport. Some of these gains can be traced to the league's subsidization by the NBA, a unique resource structure not replicated for other women's pro team sport leagues. For more on women's basketball, see Grundy and Shackelford, 2005.

greater inclusion and the transformation of sport itself. I write most about inclusion here because the question of visibility has long been at the forefront of my thinking on this issue. When the most highly culturally valued (and materially rewarded) sports are produced and consumed through mass media, what does it matter how women enact sport if no one recognizes their efforts? The issue of visibility was also important to many of my participants in pursuing inclusion in the mainstream. Momentum ticket manager Chris echoed this concern in our interview, responding somewhat tongue in cheek to a question about the potential for WPS' failure by saying, "If a tree falls in the woods and no one sees it and no one hears it, did it really fall?"

Reflexivity calls on scholars to acknowledge what Blackman (2007) calls "hidden ethnography," or empirical data on emotional constructions between researcher and participants that often goes unreported in writing due to concerns over the "legitimacy" of qualitative texts. For me, the emotions I experienced in the field in my relationships with others revolved around the issue of deception and (dis)honesty. I struggled continually to determine how much information to reveal about the goals and focus of my research. I wanted potential participants to be fully informed about my study, but I also wanted to avoid influencing others' behavior in context of a known feminist orientation as a gender scholar. In straddling these two impulses, I often felt unease about the potential for deception in how I chose to talk about my study. Such ethical dilemmas are an inherent part to qualitative research; the "ideal type" ethnographer never fully exists in practice. While insertion and acceptance into an existing system of social relationships fosters a deep understanding of the social world under study, it may also intensify the possibilities for exploitation of participants.

In many ways I did exist as the "kind" ideal-type ethnographer that Gary Alan Fine (1993) describes because I did feel a deep affinity with the goals of WPS. I felt a commitment to the success of WPS as part of a push for greater gender equality in professional sport. However, the formal statement of research goals in my proposal and consent letter was deliberately broad. In these documents, I wrote that I was researching "the historical and contemporary development of women's professional soccer in the United States." While this statement was not untrue, it did not fully reveal my interest in the question of gender equality, nor the explicitly politicized, feminist nature of my study. This was in part because I did not know what I might find in the field, but also because I feared that incorporation of gender in the language of my goals would influence both the willingness of individuals to participate in my study and my findings. I felt that if I revealed everything about my background and my assumptions, I would risk losing access to my field site or would not be accepted within the office.

The requirement for informed consent is complicated by the need for acceptance into the group, and a desire not to impact the setting in specific ways. Yet the decisions we make about how much to reveal about our approaches are an exercise of power on the part of the researcher. As Fine writes, "how much and what kinds of explanations we provide are choices that we make from a position of power and information control" (1993, p. 276). The issue of deception became particularly difficult for me in my relationship with Jordan. Despite growing closer to her over the course of the 2011 season, I never revealed my identity as a feminist to her, nor my focus on gender equality in studying the team. I sometimes wondered what she thought I was studying, without feeling fully able to ask her. I also worried that I was exploiting our friendship in service of my research aims. Jordan told me many things about the operation of the office, the challenges she faced in her work, and the relationships between team members that she might not have told

me had we not been friends. Much of this information was communicated with an air of confidence. Because I had been vague about the nature of my study, she likely was not always aware that I wrote down this information as useful to my project.

Atkinson argues that, "Truly befriending others is the ethnographic method" (2011, p. 45). This assertion is in line with recent research on the centrality of friendship relationships to qualitative research methods, as well as the inevitable ethical challenges such relationships pose. Initial access is not the same as acceptance; participation is not total becoming. It is only when you are accepted and become a total member of the group under study that you become the tool of your research, the body and self as method. While I did fully belong to the Momentum in the closeness I experienced with Jordan, I was never fully accepted by everyone in the office due to my status as a researcher. Many of the people I observed, including players, ownership, and staff, clearly felt that there was information about their work that they needed to protect. For instance, I was not allowed to attend pre-game staff meetings at the stadium until several games into the season. At these meetings, sensitive information about relations with the visiting team was often discussed. It was at Jordan's invitation that I began to attend these meetings; I needed to be vouched for by a staff member before I could be let in to the inner circle of the team. While more close relationships did begin to form with other staff in the downtime of the offseason, the league's folding precluded their total formation. The relatively short duration of my participant observation and the consequences for my level of insiderness is certainly a disadvantage to my data collection. At the same time, I was never so immersed in the field that I lost the necessary degree of detachment from my field site as a scholar. I remained highly aware of my status as researcher/outsider throughout my fieldwork.

The question of deception also extended to how I went about observation of the team. I never had a notebook or other visual reminder of my status as researcher in sight of Momentum staff. I was often able to write field notes directly while a scene was happening under cover of "working" for the team at the laptop on my desk. This meant that I captured many details and exact words as they were happening. I also used the "Memo" function on my cell phone routinely under the guise of texting or emailing; as many of the staff routinely texted or emailed on their smartphones, my activities were unremarkable.

Again in violation of supposed "ideal type" ethnography, many of my field notes were written hours after the actual observation, and often during times of sleep deprivation and distraction. For instance, I often wrote my game day field notes at midnight or later, after a beer or two at the team's post-game event. I was also teaching multiple sections of Introduction to Sociology during my fieldwork and had demands on my time and attention that detracted from the work. I missed opportunities for observation because of my teaching commitments. This was particularly true for community events that occurred on weeknights, as I had evening sections to teach. Total awareness and observation is an impossible ideal for ethnography (Fine, 1993). What is produced through ethnography is not a full, complete picture of the world under study, but a partial construction emerging from a particular standpoint and a set of limitations. I do not claim to write the definitive story of women's soccer – its people, its challenges, its processes. I write largely about one team, and from my own personal perspective.

My desire to be an unobtrusive "fly on the wall" observing the routine operations of women's soccer brought about what Avishai, Gerber, and Randles (2013) have termed the "feminist ethnographer's dilemma." Namely, "what do you do when your feminist politics clash with your empirical findings?" (2012, p. 2). In coming to the Momentum I thought I was

entering a feminist space. I did not necessarily believe that my participants would self-identify as feminist or be involved in explicitly feminist political or social movement activities. However, I did expect that those who worked full-time to sell women's soccer, often for low pay, would have a deep commitment to furthering the cause of elite female athletes in professional sport. In my mind, this commitment would be accompanied by a set of core beliefs: that with equal resources and training, female athletes are as skilled and exciting to watch as male athletes, that women's lack of opportunity in professional sport is part of a legacy of gender bias and discrimination in sport, and that gender equality in society writ large is furthered through opening opportunities in professional sport to women.

While it was true that the majority of stakeholders I spoke to were deeply committed to the survival of women's professional soccer, it was not clearly the case that they held the core "feminist" beliefs I had assumed they would. Instead there was variation in beliefs about female athleticism and the nature of the "playing field" for women. I was surprised by the espousal of anti-feminist ideas and practices internal to the team. I played neutral observer when I encountered these beliefs and practices. I nodded thoughtfully when some participants embraced what Messner (2009) calls hard essentialism, or the belief in binary biological difference between men and women and women's biological inferiority. I used neutral words such as "interesting" and "I see" and asked people to "tell me more" in interviews when they railed against the league's childcare policy for players who were also mothers. I laughed along with the group when a male staff member communicated his enthusiasm about a sponsor meeting by placing his hands around Jordan's throat and pretending to choke her. I sat in meetings and remained silent as media and corporate bigwigs, most often men, declined to contribute to the team because "there is no interest" in women's professional soccer.

What does it mean for myself as a feminist scholar to have never spoken up about ideas and practices I felt deeply skeptical of? As Olive and Thorpe write, "How can we effectively challenge perpetrators of violent or misogynistic practices observed in the field? Is it our place to do so? Must we bite our 'feminist tongue' to collect quality data?" (2011, p. 426). Olive and Thorpe (2011) offer an understanding of reflexivity as tension, conflict and heightened emotion that reveals the complexities of positioning as both participant and researcher. Moments of "feminist failure," or situations in which the researcher is in some way complicit with practices recognized to construct gender inequality, can open up new inquiry into the politics and assumptions of the researcher, as well as patterns present in the field. Rather than cover up these moments under the guise of presenting a coherent ethnographic self, we should highlights these moments of failure as revealing the contours of power.

My silence in the field was my complicity. My "feminist failures" were numerous and troubling. In moving forward from these moments, I have taken on Olive and Thorpe's call to reflexivity about those conflicted moments butting up against gender inequality as a feminist researcher. I documented these moments meticulously in my field notes, taking care to explicate both the events themselves and my own emotional reactions to these events. I offer many of them here with the goal of understanding how it is that power operates within women's sport, and with what consequences for professional women's sport teams. This, I believe, is my contribution as a feminist scholar. As Joey Sprague (2005) argues, the goal of feminist research is to highlight how inequality is constructed so that it may be challenged. She writes, "The explanations oppressed people want and need, then, are probably not about pure truth as much as they are about how to improve their lives. To understand those lives, women and other oppressed

people need to be able to see how their problems are the expression of social relations of domination" (Sprague, 2005, p. 38).

I.   **<u>Analytic Approach</u>**

Critical sport ethnography demands a particular approach to crafting analysis. Writing "emancipatory knowledge" requires accessible, jargon-free writing, and a rejection of the positive science model of objectivity in social science (Foley, 1992). By embracing accessible writing that situates the researcher in the narrative, research is more open to interpretation and dialogue with readers.

Ethnography has traditionally been based in inductive interpretations. Commonly, this takes the form of grounded theory in which theoretical analysis emerges from data, as opposed to being specified in advance. However, I reject the supposition of initial theoretical objectivity that supports a grounded theory approach. Instead, I employ what Atkinson calls "concept elaboration," or when "a researcher commences with a set of pre-configured conceptual ideas in mind and then applies them to emergent qualitative data as a means of hermeneutically 'reading,' sorting, and classifying the cultural practices under investigation" (2011, p. 38). While some scholars may be critical of this approach, concept elaboration felt like a particularly honest approach given that I had a relatively specific research question at the inception of my study.

Having been sensitized to the lack of organizational analyses in the gender and sport literature, I found it impossible to put this orientation to my research aside. I knew going into my research that I wanted to focus on organizational issues beyond the experiences of professional women's soccer players. I entered the field having studied gendered organizations theory and gender structure theory and I knew that I wanted to approach my analysis through these lenses. This orientation meant that I interpreted my experiences with the team as examples of gender

construction at multiple levels of analysis. What I saw and wrote down did not reflect an objective or full description of everything that occurred within the Momentum, but was a targeted, subjective recounting based out of my empirical and theoretical interests, as well as my own social location. I wrote early memos on the backgrounds of the people I met at the Momentum (individual level), on the formal structures and policies of the team and league (structural level), and on the interactions that I observed daily in the work of selling the team (interactional level). I paid careful attention to moments of gender construction across these levels. Sometimes, the "doing" of gender at the Momentum served to solidify women's marginal position in sport. At other times, interactions challenged the dominant gender order in professional sport (West and Zimmerman, 1987). Attuned to discussions of the "undoing" of gender stratification, I wrote early memos trying to distinguish how and when moments of resistance and change emerged.

This is not to say that unexpected patterns of findings did not emerge; they often did! These emergent findings were worked in to the coding schema I developed based out of my organizational approach, and also led to the creation of new codes. My incorporation of the institutional logics perspective in organizational theory is a result of emergent findings. Specifically, my data revealed the importance of ideas about how things "should be" done to sell a professional sports team. As a very young league selling a "product" without a long history, these ideas had not emerged directly within women's sport organizations. Rather, they reflected the positioning of the league within the larger field of sport in the U.S. The longer I was with the Momentum, the more I saw actors and organizations in the broader field of sport as central to internal WPS dynamics. Men's professional sport teams, their owners, the major national and international corporations that sponsored them, and the mainstream media personnel who wrote

about them comprised key references for WPS. Ideas about the most effective ways to sell sport

emerged from these sources. The importance of field-level influences exposed some of the

limitations to gendered organizations theory. Reading Binder's (2007) research employing an

inhabited institutions approach first demonstrated the potential utility of new institutionalism to

me, and began my application of this theoretical tradition.

In approaching my full data, I first conducted targeted coding across specific analytic

categories that corresponded to my conceptualization of my data as part of organizational

ethnography. Specifically, I coded for levels of organizational analysis. Broad first-stage codes

labelled internal Momentum dynamics, team-team dynamics, league dynamics, field-level

dynamics, and team-corporate dynamics. I then did open coding across each level of analysis.

Major codes to emerge at this stage included "family," "fandom," "media," "space/place,"

"sexuality," "marketing image," "organizational goals," and "gender order." While some of

these codes existed at only one level of analysis, most involved dynamics at multiple levels of

analysis. Further selective, or focused coding, explored the specificities of these codes across

analytic levels. Written memos elaborated these codes, tied multiple codes to one another, and

linked codes to theory.

One of the major codes to emerge in open coding I called "soccer meanings." My

participants invoked the varied cultural meanings attached to the sport of soccer in an American

context in interviews and in their daily work with the Momentum as a means of locating WPS

within the larger field of sport. These meanings were sometimes used to assert WPS' belonging

within professional sport, but were also invoked as an explanation for the disadvantages and

challenges WPS faced in seeking entry into the center of sport. These meanings were not static,

but were part of a cultural repertoire, or "tool kit" (Swidler, 1986) that individuals used to make

sense of and navigate what I argue is a culturally contradictory existence as a *women's professional* sport league. This code was something of an emergent finding; I had not expected that the specific sport that women play would be deemed so important to the likelihood of success for the league. The importance of soccer meanings to how WPS staff understood their work highlights the utility of my theoretical approach and the contribution of multi-level theorizing to sociological understandings of women's sport. As I show in the following chapter, the meanings of soccer were discussed and exchanged in interaction, emerging both from individual background within the sport and larger field-level structures and pressures.

III. FIELDS OF PLAY: SITUATING WOMEN'S PROFESSIONAL SOCCER IN THE AMERICAN SPORTS LANDSCAPE

A. **Introduction**

March 19, 2011 marked a Momentum preseason game against a regional college team. The day was hot for spring, reaching 80 degrees or more by game time at noon. Sitting in the stands with my Mother, who was visiting for the weekend, I noted approximately 1,000 people in attendance, dotted in small groups across the one side of the stadium that had been opened for the day. Scanning the crowd, I jotted notes about spectator demographics on my cell phone. I later elaborated in my fieldnotes that, "There were many young girls in attendance. About half of them seemed to be sitting with adults, and half were sitting in clusters with other girls, with adults at the end of the cluster or in the row behind. In fact, there were so many girls (and more than a few boys) that there were no adults present who were not obviously with a child. There appeared to be several girls' soccer teams in attendance, all wearing matching jerseys or t-shirts."

At the end of the game, these children immediately ran down to the railings at the front of each section of seats and began jockeying for position. At the final whistle, the players lined up to shake hands with the college players. Then they were called into a huddle in the center of the field by the head coach, where they had a short meeting. After the meeting was over, the players scattered across the field. Some went directly to the rails to interact with fans. Some talked in small groups with other Momentum players or went over to talk individually with a college player. Some went directly to the bench to rummage in their bag for a jacket, a Sharpie, or to change from cleats to sandals or sneakers. Eventually, most of the Momentum players ended up along what I came to know as "Autograph Alley," signing balls, shirts, programs, and other

items children presented to them. They took numerous photos with their young fans. Adults stood behind the children at the rails, but rarely interacted with the player themselves by asking for an autograph or photo. The adults took photos – they were not *in* photos. A young boy maybe 3 years of age sat on the floor with his chubby legs dangling through the railing. A girl a few years older, presumably his older sister, stood over him. One Momentum player signed the girl's shirt, and then smiled at the boy, wiggling her Sharpie in front of his face. "How about you?" The boy looked alarmed and vehemently shook his head. The player smiled and said, "Okay. You're just hanging out, huh?"

Contrast this scene with a second instance, taking place inside the Momentum office several months later in June. As the Women's World Cup in Germany had begun, the U.S. league was on something like a hiatus and work inside the office had slowed considerably. On this morning, I came into the office room I shared with Jordan and Grace to find the two women, as well as intern Carolyn, watching an online live stream of the morning's World Cup game while browsing the web on their respective computers. This day, June 1, was the first day of the NBA lockout, where conflict between men's pro basketball players and owners over financial issues would delay the basketball season substantially. Reading one article online about the lockout, Grace laughed loudly, honking "Haha!" Then, she read to Jordan, Carolyn, and I: "On this day in history, the NBA lost all its players, the first stoppage in league history." Grace continued to laugh. The NBA lockout was funny to her, the situation ridiculous. Jordan, too, was reading news articles online about the lockout. After a few minutes, she announced sarcastically, "I love, love, *love* this [newspaper] piece. It says the NFL and NBA are on strike, and the [local men's pro hockey team] are moving to Canada. What are [city] sports fans to do? Uh, *hello*?! The Momentum!" She laughed, adding, "We're going to force you to our games!" Jordan then

waited to see this news article posted to the newspaper's Twitter account so she could respond and point out the omission of the Momentum via social media. She continued, "That's kind of an offensive title. What will we do without sports?" From across the room, Grace agreed, saying "Uhhh duh! There's the [MLB team] and the Momentum!"

I offer these moments from the Momentum's 2011 season in order to capture the complex sociocultural positioning of a women's professional soccer league in the U.S. In the first instance, at a preseason game, women's pro soccer was clearly relevant to youth sport in the U.S. Youth soccer players, particularly girls, constituted a core audience for women's professional soccer, as evidenced by the preponderance of girls in attendance at games. During "Autograph Alley," children were quite literally the center of attention, with adults taking a backseat spatially and socially. In the second moment in the Momentum office, in contrast, the point of reference shifted to the level of professional sport in the U.S. Jordan and Grace both chafed at the exclusion of the Momentum from the ranks of the "Big Four," or men's professional basketball, football, baseball, and ice hockey. What these moments illustrate is the location of women's soccer in two distinct social fields, or meso-level social orders comprising networks of social positions. In this chapter, I argue that the Momentum saw itself as located within both youth sport and professional sport fields.

Sport sociologists have demonstrated that besides the formal rules of play, sports involve complex configurations of cultural meaning that both reflect and construct the boundaries of social belonging (Keyes, 2013). Gender has been a central component of the cultural meanings that sports possess, to the extent that scholars reference the "gender typing" of sport. The gendered meanings of sport are linked to perceptions of value, with feminized sports accorded less worth than masculine-typed sports. As recent research on cheerleading shows, cheer's

supposed feminine characteristics contribute to the perception that cheerleading is something less than a "real" sport. It is through stressing more masculine attributes such as physical strength that cheerleaders attempt to bring their activity under the rubric of "real" sport (Grindstaff and West, 2006). However, some female cheerleaders may use the feminization of cheerleading to construct identities as "girls" who are aggressive and competitive, yet appropriately heterosexual and feminine (Adams and Bettis, 2003). The gendered meanings attached to sport are not static, but reflect the evolution of a sport's development over time, its play across varying local, regional, and national contexts, and the actions of individuals and groups with particular social interests and worldviews (see also Adams, 2011).

My research extends the study of the gender typing of soccer by specifying the field-level contexts across which gendered meanings vary. The sport of soccer in an American context does not have a singular meaning. Rather, soccer is open to multiple, often contradictory meanings that vary across youth sport and professional sport fields, or what I refer to as the recreational/occupational divide. In the youth sport field, soccer is defined through the supposed sociopositive virtues of non-competitive team sport for children, and particularly for girls. Youth soccer is also centered around whiteness and the feminization of sport. Finally, soccer is what Messner (2002) calls a "center" sport at the youth level, a top participation sport for children since the 1980s. In contrast, the professional sport field defines soccer around physical aggression and competition amongst adults. In this field, soccer possesses a very different set of racial and gendered meanings, with soccer continuing to imply a nonwhite, often "un-American" maleness on the cultural margins of the field.

My ethnographic and interview data show that the project of WPS as an organization for professional female athletes is situated at the crossroads of both professional sport and youth

sport, occupying what is truly a contradictory cultural and social space. I show that this location has emerged in part out of the historical development of soccer in a U.S. context, but also reflects what I refer to as the "sport background" of those who worked for and with WPS. Sport background references the varied experiences of my participants with soccer through taking on multiple roles over time. Prior to WPS' formation, experiences with sport as a player, fan, coach, parent, and/or worker had located individuals across both youth and professional sport fields, familiarizing them with disparate sets of gendered meanings and structures in the sport. For the same individuals tied to the women's professional game, soccer was simultaneously an elite, but culturally marginalized pursuit among a predominantly nonwhite group of men and an extremely common recreational sport played by girls and boys, often including their own children.

This contradictory cultural location across two fields matters because the gender status quo in soccer is tied directly to expectations for the success of WPS as a league. As scholars building on Bourdieu's (1988) conceptions of habitus and field have argued, even seemingly individual-level characteristics like aspirations and expectations are developed in reference to existing social structures. The dual location of soccer within youth sport and professional sport fields breeds both positivity and skepticism regarding the league's chances of breaking into the "hegemonic sport space" of the U.S. (Markovits and Hellerman, 2001). On the one hand, the persistent linking of maleness with competitive, professional team sport bred pessimism among many that WPS would find room for itself in the national sport space. Many women's soccer stakeholders invoked the idea of "double disadvantage" to situate the league as marginal in comparison to both men's sport and Big Four center sports. On the other hand, the successes of the U.S. Women's National Team, particularly in the 1999 Women's World Cup, in tandem with the growth of girls' and women's participation in soccer since the 1970s, presented a clear

example of what could be for women's professional soccer. Many used the trope of "the 99'ers" to argue for the eventual success of the national league in building cultural space for itself.

In the following sections, I highlight those aspects of soccer's development in a U.S. context that are relevant to the complex field position of WPS as an organization. I show that the cultural meanings attached to the sport of soccer vary across the youth and professional sport fields, with the "recreational" and "occupational" split mapping along age, gender, racial/ethnic, and national origin divides. I show that the "sport background" of those tied to the Momentum and WPS linked familiarity with the disparate gender orders of youth and pro sport fields to expectations for the league's success. Ultimately, the location of women's professional soccer within fields containing quite different sets of cultural meaning produced a strong sense of uncertainty about the potential for WPS to "make it" in a U.S. context. I argue that we cannot delve further into the practices of the team and league without understanding how those involved with WPS situate the league culturally given the unique gendered, racialized and classed historical context of soccer in this county.

B.   **Soccer in U.S. History**

While soccer has long been an extraordinarily popular sport in much of the world, it began to attain a measure of popularity in the United States only in the 1970s. Prior to this decade, soccer was a sport played almost exclusively within male immigrant communities (Fields, 2005; Markovits and Hellerman, 2001; Markovits and Hellerman, 2003; Martinez, 2008; Shugart, 2003). Markovits and Hellerman (2001) argue that soccer has been effectively "crowded out" of the United States' sporting landscape until very recently for three interrelated reasons. First, the much earlier development of baseball, football, and basketball, as well as the widespread dissemination of these sports through the educational system, meant there

was little cultural room for soccer. Second, those who did play and watch soccer (primarily immigrant men) often saw soccer as distinctly *un*-American, a way of cultivating and maintaining ethnic ties. Third, soccer lacked a strong, centralized organizational network.

In contrast to other sports – American football is a notable example – soccer has never been strongly linked to the construction of hegemonic masculinities (Messner, 2009; Shugart, 2003). In short, soccer has never been typed as "masculine" in the ways that other sports have been, in large part because those who played prior to the second half of the 20st century (immigrant men) could never attain culturally dominant, middle-class, heterosexual ideals of masculinity. As Anderson (2009) argues, hegemonically constructed masculinity is equally about achieved behaviors and ascribed characteristics, such as race and sexuality. Because soccer was the sport of immigrants, many of whom were not white or class privileged, it was placed in distinct contrast to sports building "authentic" white, middle class, heterosexual American maleness.

The historical dearth of ties between soccer and hegemonic masculinity meant that the sport has historically been more open to women's play than others. For instance, girl's and women's participation in soccer was less strongly resisted after the passage of Title IX than it was within basketball and baseball (Fields, 2005). In his study of youth soccer and baseball coaches, Michael Messner (2009) found greater acceptance of female coaches in soccer youth leagues, compared to Little League, because soccer has never been culturally associated with masculinity in the same ways as has been true for baseball. Women in his study felt they were more valued as able coaches in the sport of soccer than as baseball coaches.

Thus the very "otherness" and gendered cultural marginality of soccer, in part, allowed it to flourish as a women's game (Markovits and Hellerman, 2003; Shugart, 2003). Beginning at

the tail end of the 1970s and into the 1980s, soccer became enormously popular as a youth sport, and particularly as a girls' youth sport, for a myriad of overlapping reasons: because it was assumed that anyone could play, including smaller children, it was relatively cheap compared to other sports, it was thought to be safer with less contact, and it allowed lots of people to participate at once (Fields, 2005; Markovits and Hellerman, 2001). Youth rules often curbed the most vicious competition, which urged mixing players with different abilities. Fields argues, "Given the reasons for the popularity of the sport (persons of any size could play with relatively low risk of injury, the game was not expensive, and the sport was relatively noncompetitive), it comes as no surprise that girls and young women were allowed, in fact, encouraged, to play" (2005, p. 89).

A 1977 lawsuit won by a high school girl who had been kicked off the boy's junior varsity soccer team helped to open up the sport to girls and women by demonstrating the legislative "teeth" of the 14th amendment's equal protection clause (Fields, 2005). Girls' participation in soccer increased substantially beginning in the 1980s; today it is the number one participation sport for girls (Keyes, 2013). Although soccer may have been attractive in part because of beliefs that "anyone could play," in fact, not everyone did play as the popularity of the game for youth increased. Soccer's association with immigrant communities weakened in the second half of the 20th century, and the sport became entrenched as a white, suburban pastime (Markovits and Hellerman, 2001). In 1968, when the two men's professional soccer leagues at the time joined forces to become the North American Soccer League (NASL), this new organization marketed itself to white, middle class suburbanites, a departure from soccer's usual fan base of international and migrant male populations. The NASL also cultivated ties to youth soccer organizations, hoping to develop their future fan base. In promoting "family-friendly"

sporting events, early men's professional soccer leagues constructed links between soccer participation, fandom, and white, middle class, suburban communities that helped spur the growth of the women's game (Dure, 2010; Markovits and Hellerman, 2003). In addition, largescale migration of white, middle class families to the suburbs around the 1950s meant increases in the open spaces needed to play soccer, which laid the ground for the future growth of girls' club and recreational teams.

Some argue that if any women's team sport has the potential to penetrate the male-dominated U.S. "sports space," it is soccer (Markovits and Hellerman, 2001). However, the very factors which sparked the increased popularity of soccer as a women's sport may also undermine the game's potential to become a mass spectator sport. Soccer's historical reputation as a less masculine, cooperative game allowed for girls and women to participate in increasing numbers, but may compromise soccer's ability to appear as "equal" to culturally dominant sports such as football and basketball. To date, however, "women's involvement in soccer has received little attention from academics" (Cox and Thompson, 2000, p. 5, see also Henry and Comeaux, 1999).

C.   <u>**Soccer as Occupation**</u>

For many of those who worked for or with WPS, including those tied to the Momentum, the sport of soccer was referenced as an occupational, or professional, pursuit. At the professional level, elite soccer played by adults was largely acknowledged to be outside of the institutional core of professional team sport in America, as WPS manager Amy admitted in saying, "It's [soccer] not a national sport in our country." As soccer is much more popular as a mass spectator sport outside of the U.S., "the U.S. has been long regarded as a 'rejectionist' of football [soccer]" (Giulianotti and Robertson, 2012, p. 217). Momentum season ticket holder and

longtime women's national team fan April also invoked this perception when she said, "Soccer's not that big of a thing in America. Well I'm sure you've read all the articles too where for some reason Americans think that soccer is a communist plot or socialist plot, or [laughs] you know what I'm saying?"

Many women's soccer stakeholders reported past experiences with sport that had solidified the idea that elite soccer is culturally foreign to the U.S. and is more popular elsewhere. Despite the existence of women's professional and semi-professional leagues in many countries, not a single person I spoke to throughout the course of my research mentioned familiarity with women's leagues outside of the U.S. Instead, interviewees reported watching European or South American men's professional soccer during travel abroad or in the context of friendships with those born in other countries. These experiences established adult, elite soccer as both male and external to U.S. sporting space. Daniel, one of the Momentum's photographers, said that his soccer fandom was initially sparked through international travel related to his work. His time outside of the U.S. made him aware that soccer was "bigger elsewhere." He reported that the people he met and worked with followed the men's international game closely, and as a result he began to follow the European men's professional leagues. Similarly, Dean traveled abroad with the Air Force and discovered that soccer was the dominant center sport in many countries outside of the U.S. He said, "Soccer was a big thing because they had all these bases overseas and so everybody played soccer." Jason, a WPS staff member and musician, had worked overseas recording backup for professional musicians. He said, "In Germany that's kind of what they do. You work on music stuff and then the entire studio would shut down because there was a soccer match on. I'm not kidding. You would see, you'd have like 30 people in the studio. All of them would be in the little break room watching the soccer match on like a 13-inch

TV." And WPS staffer Ronald became a fan of the game in this way: "I started hanging out with a guy who had played professionally in South America, and he was a bartender, and I would go in the afternoon where he was working and they had a satellite dish so we would sit there and watch."

Momentum consultant Sasha was the manager of men's professional teams in Europe, and from his perspective, these leagues were the pinnacle of the sport. He often spoke about his work with men's teams outside of the U.S. and used them as an important point of reference for the Momentum. For instance, one mid-season weekday found Sasha in the office room I shared with the Momentum's corporate sponsor and media staff. It was a full house that summer day, and each cubicle was packed with staff and interns. Standing in front of us Momentum staff, who were all seated, Sasha put on a show. He loudly joked to us from the doorway, "Do you know why Germans have big ears? Because their fathers picked them up by the ears when they were young, pulled them over the dyke to see Holland, and said there! That's how you play soccer." The Momentum staff laughed at Sasha's teasing voice, but the larger point was clear – the men's game outside of the U.S. (here, in Holland) is at the top of the global soccer food chain.

Women also reported that their relationships with those born outside of the U.S. had shaped their perceptions of the cultural positioning of soccer. Invoking of soccer as male and foreign to the U.S. was not unique to men, but was a widely shared point of conversation. For instance, Momentum season ticket holder Carol, who was 38 years old, had played soccer growing up. As a teen, her soccer coach was assisted by a friend from England. This friend had introduced Carol and her teammates to European men's soccer. Carol said, "When I was about 14, a coach had a friend who lived in England. This friend was male. He had videotapes of the Bundesliga. At that time I think it was the EPL, I don't know. The Premier League wasn't

established at that time. But yeah, he had tapes and we would watch them, and I remember it changed the entire way I viewed the game." Similarly, Momentum season ticket holder Liz said that her West Indian family members exposed her to the fact of soccer's dominance outside of the U.S. Liz reported, "My ex-husband's family, he's from, like I said, Trinidad and the West Indies. And soccer is much better there because it's a British colony than what it is in the United States. I mean, everything is – in Germany, soccer and football in Germany, you know what I mean? That's – when everybody, all the dual communities, for everybody there's recreational leagues. Children are involved in soccer and they rally around their local teams and it's huge, much bigger there than here in the United States."

Some WPS staff members had worked for men's professional leagues in the U.S. These employment experiences shaped staff perceptions of the positioning of soccer relative to other sports in a U.S. context. Momentum managers Jordan and Chris had formerly worked for U.S. men's professional soccer teams, and Momentum manager Kendall and paid intern Dillon had previously worked for National Football League (NFL) teams. In our post-season interview at a local restaurant, I told Jordan about a conversation I'd had with the corporate sponsor manager of the local Major League Baseball (MLB) team, a man the Momentum had reached out to for advice on several occasions during the spring pre-season. I reported that the MLB manager had laughed when I asked him how he sold the team to potential sponsors. The man, Jerome, had said that he rarely had to sell the team. Instead, corporate sponsors came to him! In response to my story, Jordan acknowledged this to be true for baseball, but argued that sponsorship would work very differently for soccer, given its comparative cultural marginalization. Jordan's experiences working for a Major League Soccer (MLS) team had shown her that, as she said, "It's not like that for MLS. They have to go sell."

The attachment of soccer to sport at the professional level was also tied to a broad configuration of age, racial/ethnic, gendered, and national-origin meanings given the unique history of the sport in the U.S. Professional soccer was perceived not only as an adult men's sport outside of the center of U.S. sport, but as a sport played explicitly by non-white, often immigrant men within the U.S. Culturally, soccer was acknowledged to be coded as non-white, and most often, as Latino. As Sean Brown (2007) argues, the association of soccer with immigrant men "foreign" to the U.S. is not merely an historical fact, but remains an ongoing creation driven by changing demographic and immigration patterns, as well as the visibility of immigration as a source of social and political debate in recent years. In addition to the historical development of soccer, recent experiences solidified the reputation of soccer as non-white among my participants. For instance, I met Momentum sponsor Nathan at the business he owned, an indoor sports facility that was set up for indoor soccer. As we sat on the small set of bleachers outside of the turf field, Nathan told me about attending a game of the local men's semiprofessional team. Nathan said, "I've been to one [team] game this year and the only reason why I don't is because it takes me an hour to get over there. I had a good time watching that game. The announcers in the stadium were speaking Spanish. Everybody around me was Spanish. It was like, "This is *men's* soccer. Holy cow. This is *men's* soccer." And Margaret's perceptions of the relative popularity of soccer across cities in the U.S. hinged upon the racial/ethnic makeup of city populations. She said, "The other reason why Texas is so big, you know, and California has such a huge Hispanic population and that feeds into it, too." David Keyes (2013) argues that despite shifting participation demographics over time, U.S. soccer possesses a "residual ethnicity" that links the sport to non-white, male bodies and solidifies the sport's location outside of the cultural mainstream.

D.   **<u>Soccer as Recreation</u>**

In contrast to soccer's association with professional, adult play, soccer was also frequently discussed as a youth sport. Half of all interview participants had children at the time of their interview, although some of these children were now young adults. All of the children of those I spoke to, however, had played soccer at the youth level, and several had continued to play in high school or college. The adults I spoke to had extensive experience watching youth soccer and often had helped to coach or organize their children's teams. In addition, several adults who did not have children themselves were currently coaches for youth soccer teams. Youth recreational soccer was perceived to be extremely mainstream to the point where "everyone is doing it" and it seemed almost automatic to enroll children in the sport. For example, when Momentum staff member David was looking to enroll his 5-year old daughter in her first group activity, he was encouraged by family and friends to sign up for youth soccer through the local YMCA. The metropolitan area was acknowledged to be a hotbed for youth soccer in the south. Margaret said, "And so it was one of those things where like in some parts of the country if a little boy doesn't play Little League, you know, you think they can't walk. Well in the [city] area if your kid doesn't play soccer, what's the matter with him?" U.S. Soccer, the national organization for the sport, estimated that youth participation in the state in 2011 was at over 80,000, giving the southern state the Momentum was located in the second highest youth participation rate in the region.

For the parents I spoke to, soccer had been the ubiquitous first-choice sport for children, and both recreational and competitive leagues had been easy to find. Momentum sponsor Curtis, who was 45 years old, had witnessed the growth of opportunities for youth soccer firsthand. He said, "Well, there's certain soccer hot beds in the country. It used to be there were little patches of soccer teams. Now they're all over. It's gotten a lot more. Back when I was in high school, it

was considered kind of big, but now it's huge. Now, soccer's probably the most popular varsity high school sport in the area." Parents reported that when their children were very young, they signed them up for soccer almost automatically. Soccer was selected for children because as a team sport, the game involved significant cooperation with others. Soccer was widely believed to help children develop social, as well as physical skills. Reporter Alicia said, "It's [soccer's] a very team sport. It's not an individual sport like baseball. It was pretty cool. It was like everybody worked together to achieve one goal." Season ticket holder Carl said, "When our daughter joined, it could have been something else. It could've been another sport. But she enjoys this. It's something where you learn from a team kinda thing. Social skills hopefully improve. Not hopefully, you *do* learn social skills. You have to deal with people as part of a team." And WPS staff member Renee coached high school girls' soccer. She said,

> "Number one I liked the team concept that you get in soccer. You know, you have to have individual performance, but you have to have all 11 people functioning together. That's one thing I like. And I really like the physicality of it; you're always – you know, there's never a down moment. You're always moving. It's not a sedentary sport, so that's something that I like about it. You know, it's challenging; it's challenging physically and it's challenging mentally."

As Jay Coakley (2011) argues, there is a widespread belief in the U.S. that sport contributes positively to youth development. While Coakley argues for caution on this point, given evidence that sport participation may be harmful to youth in some contexts, other research has suggested that sport leagues provide ample opportunities for youth to develop confidence, physical competence, and positive social relationships with others (Fraser-Thomas, Côté, and Deakin, 2005). Those tied to women's soccer believed strongly that participation in soccer was uniquely beneficial to youth. A second reason many parents liked soccer was because the game's 11 players displaced the need for any individual player to be highly skilled, and allowed kids to play without being overly talented. Soccer among youth was tied to fun and cooperation with

others, as opposed to competition and winning. Momentum staff member David said about his 5-year old daughter's soccer team, "It's not about wins and losses. She's just having fun." Team sports placed less pressure on individual participants to be highly skilled. Season ticket holder and Momentum volunteer Dean said, "I've always from day one said, look they're going to play a team sport. Not an individual sport because there you really do have to have a level of skill and, you know I didn't want the pressure to be solely on them. So soccer is great from that standpoint that as a team sport they can not be good at it and still be part of the team and still, you know get all the benefits and socialization and the camaraderie and whatnot." The idea that "anyone can play" soccer was repeated even by those without children or experience with youth soccer. For instance, women's soccer fan Kristy was 24 and did not have children. She used the example of her own sport experience as a competitive gymnast to make the case for soccer's accessibility as a sport. She said, "A lot of people can try basketball or soccer pretty easily, you know. But few people can do gymnastics, and few people can do gymnastics well."

Finally, a few parents made the case that soccer, and sports more generally, kept kids out of trouble. Nathan, who owned the indoor sports facility and routinely saw large groups of children playing soccer, explained his perception that local kids were at risk of misbehavior without available sports leagues. He said,

> "Came down here, started coaching middle school kids and high school kids. In the off season, I was finding that these same stinking brats were getting in trouble. I was like, "What are you doing? Off season, why don't you pick up a lacrosse stick? Why don't you go do this and pick something fun to do – something better for you than go throw frigging lawn chairs in a pool?" Right? And it's because they had to nowhere to go."

Paul, Cherish's husband and father to three soccer-playing daughters, said, "For kids growing up, you're gonna be less likely to be obese if you're active. You're around other people that like to do something that is good as opposed to you're not playing soccer. And you're

around people that smoke. So you're around people that like to run and kick a ball. It's not that if you don't play soccer you're gonna smoke. But you might be around people that like to. So it puts you around people that like to do things that we would say are good."

In contrast to soccer's positioning as marginal to Big Four men's sports at the professional level, soccer was embraced through an explicit rejection of "The Big Four" for youth participation. At the recreational youth level, sports comprising the dominant center of American sport culture (football, basketball, and baseball) were rejected in favor of soccer. Soccer, then, was at the center of the youth sport experience, preferred to any other sport. In fact, soccer has emerged as a top participation sport for youth nationwide, as it currently exists as the second ranked sport in player numbers after baseball/softball (Keyes, 2013). Parents liked soccer more than baseball, basketball, and football because it was cheap, easy to learn, involved near-constant action, and involved minimal risk of injury. Momentum sponsor Curtis mentioned the ease of play when he said, "It's much easier to teach a little kid to play soccer than it is to try to get them to play baseball or to buy all the crap that they need to play football. Soccer is a great game. My son and my daughter, they both like sports where there's continuous action. My son played a couple years of baseball and hated it because you just stand there for half a game." Dean referenced the inexpensive startup costs for soccer, saying, "Because, you know as a sport it's cheap. You just need a field and some cleats and a ball and you're pretty much good. Football's an expensive sport to try to do." And Paul liked the continual action of soccer, compared to baseball. He said, "When you start when you're that young, you can't really start baseball when you're that young, because it's too boring for kids. You stand in right field, waiting for something, you're five, six years old, you're gonna pick your nose and sit down and pluck grass. There's just nothing to do. With soccer with little kids, it's herd the ball. They all

get to run and burn energy, and they all get to feel like they're doing something, and it's kind of conceptually pretty easy."

Those characteristics invoked by parents for soccer's perceived appropriateness for youth – for instance, accessibility, teamwork, and minimal risk – are simultaneously part of what Keyes (2013) calls the "domestication" of soccer in the U.S. Keyes is referencing the growth of soccer as a participation sport for youth beginning in the 1980s. Specifically, this growth occurred among class privileged, largely white families outside of large urban areas. In addition, the rise of youth soccer as a participation sport took place among girls, more so than boys. The popularity of youth soccer in suburban communities like the ones that the majority of my participants lived in, reflects a major shift in the meanings attached to soccer in the U.S. The very characteristics that allowed for the rising popularity of soccer among youth reflect a feminization of the sport that places value on supposedly feminine traits such as cooperation over more masculine attributes such as aggression and competition. As scholars have pointed out, this domestication of soccer is not only a feminization, but also a *suburbanization* of the sport, as soccer's popularity at the youth level rose most starkly in suburban, affluent areas. Soccer at the youth level was thus tied to a specific configuration of racial/ethnic, gendered, and classed meanings. Youth soccer has become a simultaneous invocation of racial and class meanings, as the sport at this level is culturally tied to whiteness and class privilege (Messner, 2009; Swanson, 2009). As Henry and Comeaux note, "The synergy between soccer and a middle-class habitus rests on several qualities ascribed to the sport….the 'feminization' of soccer is thus a corollary of its appropriation by the middle class" (1999, p. 279).

My study revealed the assumptions of whiteness and class privilege that continue to surround the women's game. As Momentum manager Tanya said, "Obviously, soccer is upper to

middle class and predominantly white." In the middle of the 2011 season, Momentum owner

Steve invited the entire staff to a local bar for a happy hour that would be paid for by the team.

The goal of the event was to boost morale among staff and provide opportunities for socializing.

My younger sister was visiting at the time, and she and I sat along one side of a long table

directly across from Steve's wife Laura and office manager Sandra. Laura was talking with

Sandra about her interactions with the Momentum players, none of whom were present at the

happy hour. Laura said that she always had trouble keeping track of the players' names. "For

starters," she explained to Sandra, "They all look alike! Last year it was the blondes. This year,

the brunettes." Then, Laura turned to my sister and I across the table, and said laughing, "They

look just like you!" As white, brunette women in our 20s, my sister and I did "look like" the

majority of the Momentum players in 2011. With the exception of one African American player,

all of the players were white. This pattern within the team reflected a pattern present in women's

soccer in a larger sense, as the majority of players in the league and in the college game in 2011

were white.

In a post-season staff meeting in September of 2011, Momentum owner Steve reflected

on the position of soccer as a center sport among white, class privileged women. In his opinion,

players' move from college to professional soccer was often experienced as downward mobility

given the privileges many had experienced from a young age. Referencing the Momentum

players, Steve said,

> "They're white, they're middle class. They're had everything their entire lives. College
> soccer programs spoil them, and take care of their housing, their travel, their food, their
> budgeting. They are not prepared to come into a league where they don't have all of these
> aspects of their lives taken care of. Plus, they are in a situation where they may be part of
> a team one day, and the next out of a job if their performance suffers. It's stressful."

E.   **Women's Professional Soccer: Margins or Center?**

Soccer was described as belonging to both the professional sport and youth sport fields. The unique configurations of age, racial/ethnic, and gendered meaning attached to soccer within each field place WPS as an organization in a culturally contradictory social location as both a women's (youth center) and professional (men's marginal) sport. Those who were deeply tied to the project of WPS simultaneously acknowledged that soccer was not quite a national sport at the elite level and that soccer was entirely mainstream and focal at the youth level. This complicated positioning has been noted as "interesting" by Keyes (2013) and "striking" by Van Rheenen, who argues that, "This public perception of soccer as non-American is striking given the sport's long history in the United States and its tremendous popularity among youth and adult amateur athletes today" (2009, p. 784). In fact, the paradox of soccer in the U.S. is that the sport emerged as central to women's sport participation precisely because it was, in the elite realm, marginalized. Markovits and Albertson confirm that women's soccer has grown "perhaps precisely because women excelled at this sport that has remained so secondary to the main denizens of the American sports space: men" (2012, p. 83).

The paradoxical location of soccer was highly salient to those working in and with WPS and the Momentum. This location produced a high degree of uncertainty as to the likelihood of the league's longevity, visibility, and financial stability. At times, many of those I spoke to centered the meanings of soccer at the professional level to make a case for the league's marginalization. From this perspective, WPS faced a major uphill battle in seeking success and was multiply marginalized by the existing power structure in U.S. professional sport. Participants argued that a women's professional soccer league struggled because of persistent associations of competitive soccer with maleness and "un-Americanness" and the dominance of men's football, baseball, and basketball in the professional sport field.

The sense of layered disadvantage and struggle for WPS was articulated through varied versions of terms indicating multiplicity. For instance, reporter Alicia said that WPS faced a "double whammy" of disadvantage in a U.S. context. She argued,

> "I think it's the double whammy because soccer in America already has a hard time. Even the men's soccer, they're having a hard time getting off the ground. I mean I still feel like the world kind of looks down upon the USA as a football [soccer] nation because it's not our sport and we're still a growing sport here. And then if you look at women's soccer, it's even lower, and it's just because of the mentality of any women's sport."

In the same way that Alicia described a "double whammy," paid Momentum intern Dillon referenced the notion of "double minority" in explaining the league's search for fans. When I asked Dillon why he thought women's professional soccer had experienced struggle, he responded "Because – I mean soccer in general isn't as popular in America as it is overseas. So I feel like it's hard when you're looking for a crowd. You're already looking for the minority in the crowd, then you're looking for the other minority inside that minority with being the women's league. Because it's just not – the women's leagues don't usually draw as much attention as the men's league do." In a similar vein, Jason referred to an "extra hurdle" for WPS, saying,

> "You're fighting an uphill battle just because soccer's not, it doesn't have the cultural impact that it does over in Europe here. I mean, people just didn't grow up even having it around. They grew up on football, baseball, and that's all they know. And it's going to be really hard to win them over. If you get them hooked on the game, I think that's our biggest hurdle. I mean the women's part might be a little extra hurdle."

Jeannette, a 22-year old woman who ran an independent news website that covered women's soccer, used the word "multi" to refer to the problems that the project of a women's professional league faced. She said, "You know, this is the third time in U.S. history that the men's soccer league has had a league. And now they're finally sticking around. But there were other leagues in the past that failed. I don't think they failed as quickly as the women's league

did, but they still failed. In the women's league, I think that the problems are multi." Fellow

media reporter Raymond also referenced the dominance of both men's and Big Four sports as

dual sources of WPS' disadvantage. He argued, "So it's [WPS] not like the NFL or the NBA,

where the men's version of the sport is already widely successful. So it's still kind of in that very

much growth stage, the sport of soccer generally, and then you take it a step further, and it's the

women's league." WPS manager Courtney concluded that, "Soccer is just a tough sell in the

United States. I mean, they'd [US Soccer] had a successful men's World Cup, but this was

women's. No one really understood it."

WPS as a league was acknowledged to be doubly marginalized in face of the cultural

centrality of men's sport *and* Big Four sports. The consequence of this layered cultural

marginalization was that the league was believed to be taken lightly by virtue of both its sport

and the gender of its players. While for some, this consequence existed merely in perception,

others reported specific interactions with others in which WPS had been brushed off or treated as

unimportant because of its doubly disadvantaged location. For example, Momentum volunteer

and past WPS staff member Dean reported that a close friend had "scoffed" at WPS in

comparing it to the more "serious" European men's leagues. Dean said,

> "He [friend] said so if you're at the top level league and you win it, not only did you beat
> all your teams, you beat every team below you. And then they take the best of those guys
> and move it to this cross European premier league. So he was trying to say, you know
> this is the fancy stuff, this is really serious. Because I remember bringing up – I just
> learned about WPS here in [city], and he scoffed at me, he's like you know that's not
> serious soccer."

Reporter Brad began to cover the women's elite game in the early-1990s on his own

initiative and told me that he heard from many people that he was wasting his time. Brad said,

"[1995] Women's World Cup, I had someone tell me, "Women's soccer, people don't even pay

attention to men's soccer in this country!" And I'm thinking you have no idea how much this

thing could really be big." While other perceived the women's game to be marginal in a U.S. context and not worth investment, Brad disagreed and continued to cover the sport. And WPS staff member Ronald, one of the few African Americans working for the league, said soccer had a "girlie" reputation in the U.S. To Ronald, the feminized reputation of soccer in the U.S. (compared to Big Four sports) was connected to disinterest in the league, especially on the part of men. Ronald told me,

> "Especially in the United States as opposed to the rest of the world, ironically it's considered a woman's game. But it's the rest of the world where men won't watch women play because they think that soccer, or football as they call it, is such a macho thing. They don't want women in their sport. Well, I just – I really feel for the women in trying to break into this sport both here and internationally because, again, here, soccer is considered girlie, and only girls play it and I'm not going to watch it because I'm a man."

For women's soccer players, the transition from college play to the professional level came with new, quite unexpected challenges, a pattern that Momentum owner Steve hinted at above. In essence, shifting upward in level of competition was not the shift upward in status and prestige that many players desired or envisioned. Instead, moving to the professional level was a shift from center to margins. Because soccer at the professional level takes on the "double disadvantage" articulated by many staff members, some players expressed a sense of downward mobility and disappointment in their experiences as they went pro. For instance, in her 2012 memoir, U.S. Women's National Team goalkeeper Hope Solo writes about her expectations after she was drafted into WUSA, the first professional league for women:

> "Professional soccer wasn't turning out to be what I expected. The launch of the Women's United Soccer Association in 2001 – the first professional soccer league for women – seemed to me like a natural evolution, not a revolution…When I was drafted by the WUSA, I thought I was joining the big time. I'd been in college and wasn't paying much attention to the league's growing pains or the dire forecasts. When Philadelphia drafted me, I felt I had arrived – a professional athlete, in the same category as Shaq or A-Rod. But by early May, I was learning the hard truth – women's professional soccer wasn't anything like the NBA or Major League Baseball" (2012, p. 105).

While the "double whammy" made many internal to WPS acutely aware of the challenges of a women's professional league, in other moments the same individuals relied on the twin pillars of youth soccer dominance and the successes of the Women's National Team in international competition to assert belonging in professional sport and to argue for the potential of WPS. Some argued that women's soccer at the pro level could only really exist as a viable organization in the U.S. For instance, Jim said, "When it comes to soccer, women's professional soccer, it's pretty much a United States thing. That's why they bring in Marta [Brazilian star], and some of these other [international] players. It's really the only place to do it." While women's professional leagues in other countries do exist, participants such as Jim believed that the U.S. league was comparatively more high-profile, resource rich, and financially viable because of the unique gendering of sport space in the U.S. For Jim, the fact that WPS drew high-level talent away from other professional leagues around the world was evidence of the unique promise of WPS.

Echoing Jim's comment, Markovits and Hellerman (2001) argue that women's soccer has developed, both in terms of participation and cultural visibility, precisely in those nations in which the men's game is not part of the hegemonic sport landscape. The history of soccer in the U.S. shows that the women's game is distinct, both quantitatively in the number of female players and qualitatively in the nature of the game's centrality at the youth level, compared to soccer in nations where men's soccer exists as the preeminent sport. Soccer is a space of "exceptionalism" for female athletes in the U.S. This is because of the unique history of the game in this country. This history reflects various configurations of racial, class, and gender meanings as they intersect with sport over time. This "exceptionalism" was often invoked in order to envision a positive future for WPS as a league.

Joshua, the 26-year old manager for a midwestern WPS team, was born and grew up in England and had first come to the U.S. as an adult for advanced education. Joshua said that growing up in England, he felt that fandom of men's elite soccer "was almost required." Although England has had a women's national team since 1972, and this team has enjoyed success at the international level, Joshua felt that the dominance of the men's game made women's soccer invisible to him until he came to the U.S. He said, "Obviously soccer as a whole, I was a fan of the game. But women's soccer was really looked down upon. It was banned by the FA until '89 or whatever. 70 years or so. I remember in school, you just didn't expect girls to play football or any sport at all, really, except for netball or maybe field hockey. I don't remember seeing a girl play soccer until I went to college [in the U.S.]. I wasn't even aware that it wasn't happening. It was completely invisible." Joshua argued that women's soccer was more widely accepted and embraced in the U.S., compared to England. Joshua expressed a strong sense of optimism for the league given the different levels of visibility for women's soccer he had seen across national contexts.

The international successes of the U.S. Women's National Team in terms of wins, ticket sales, and fan attendance, were invoked quite often as a sign that the national league could and (eventually) would carve out lasting cultural space for itself. Some of the optimism for the league's chances emerged from the experiences of older [35+] WPS staff members and fans who had attended the 1996 Olympics, the first-ever Games for women's soccer. The 1996 Atlanta Olympics had been held quite close to the city the Momentum was located in. Some Momentum staff members, fans, and sponsors had attended or volunteered at the Games and vividly recalled watching the women's team earn the gold medal in front of a sold-out crowd. 42-year old Catherine was so enthusiastic about our interview conversation about women's soccer at the

1996 Olympics that she emailed me a folder of photographs she had taken of the women's games. April, too, emphasized the importance of this event by mailing me a package of memorabilia from Olympic women's soccer after our interview. While these were rare moments of enormous kindness in which my participants helped my research, they are also evidence of the level of optimism and excitement that moments of international victory created for those tied to WPS. 35-year old Liz had also attended women's soccer in 1996 and felt that the team's success led directly to the growth and visibility of the women's game more broadly. Liz said, "I think when they did really well in the Olympics, it probably did the most for women's soccer because everybody watches the Olympics. It doesn't matter what – curling or whatever, people sit there and watch it. And I think when the women's soccer did really well in the Olympics and got the gold medal, people really started to pay attention."

While men and women were equally likely to point out the challenges WPS faced as both a women's league and soccer league in the U.S., women were more likely than men to feel strongly that the U.S. Women's National Team successes were important and meaningful as indicators of the potential growth and viability of women's elite team sport. In part, this was because a greater number of women I spoke to had attended past international tournaments, and had paid closer attention to these past victories. This gendered pattern was also a function of the greater personal investment many women expressed in the success of women's sport leagues. Most of the women I interviewed who were 35 or older had grown up in an era without many formal opportunities for sport participation. Many described overt bias and discrimination that had existed for girls and women interested in playing or watching sport when they were younger. Compared to their early experiences, moments of heightened visibility and buy-in for female athletes on an international platform were a revelation. Thus, greater optimism on the part of

women was, in part, a result of how deeply and personally they identified with the evolution of women in sport.

While the 1996 Olympics was an important marker of potential success for a women's professional league, the major point of reference was the 1999 Women's National Team, or "the '99ers." The women's victory in that year's Women's World Cup, and the national media and sponsor attention that victory garnered, was held up as evidence that women's soccer could attract major attention. The tournament was, in fact, a major cultural event and turning point that put soccer on the national map. As Davis, the owner and manager of a Midwest WPS team said, "After the 1999 World Cup, women's soccer blew up and became cool all of a sudden." With the 1999 World Cup and the birth of WUSA, the first women's pro league, women's soccer "carved out a recognizable niche in the cultural sports space of the United States" (Markovits and Hellerman, 2000, p. 21). Amy, a high-ranking manager for a west coast WPS team, lauded the stars of 1999 as having "pioneered" the growth of the sport. Amy said,

> "Well, think about the team, though. Think about they came off the World Cup in '99, and launched the league in 2001. We had the founding members and the girls – that team we refer to as the girls of summer, there was never a team, and there never will be in my estimation, a team like that. They were the part of American soccer for women in this country and around the world. The Mia's, and the Kristine Lilly's and Foudy's and Michelle Akers. I think just, you know I mean they are the pioneers."

Season ticket holder Carl, who was 38, had attended the 1999 Women's World Cup when he was in his 20s. He recalled, "Well I just remember in Los Angeles where it was just the pinnacle for numbers and attendance. Everything else. They beat China. It seems like Mia Hamm, the whole crew, they were playing. It seems like it was really taking off during that period of time." Similarly, Jason reported that women's soccer had gained momentum nationally due to both the '96 Olympics and '99 Women's World Cup. Jason told me, "And it [women's soccer] started to get a little bit of attention just because it [Olympics] was here, and then we had

the Women's World Cup which we actually won, and I think you just had the momentum of having like an international event here, and then having the women win it, and then they started the league.I think that's why you had the household names because you had the momentum of the World Cup building up." And Erin captured the feeling of many WPS staff and fans that the late 1990s and early 2000s were a period of remarkable change for women's sport, to the extent that everything seemed to be going "right." She noted, "In Atlanta [Olympics], it [women's soccer] was so phenomenal, and it did seem like it had done so well, and it did have the better attendance. Maybe other teams in the league might have felt then the way our team feels to me now. So it's hard to say. But it was just everything about it was right for us in the early 2000's."

The trope of "the '99ers" was highly salient not only in interviews, but also as part of my observation of the Momentum as it built itself prior to and during the 2011 season. In fact, WPS as a league had been founded within the framing of the 1999 and WUSA legacy. For instance, Momentum owner Steve put on a formal press conference with local and regional reporters when he announced the addition of his team to WPS after the league's 2009 season. One of the points of the conference was to unveil the team's name. The name "Momentum" was the same name as the team that had played in the same city during the WUSA years. One reporter asked, "Why did you choose the same name as the previous team that was part of WUSA?" Steve listed several reasons in response, one being, "The new team name embraces the previous on and off field success held by the WUSA team." This team "embrace" of those past pioneers of the sport extended to the 2011 home opener in May. It was a chilly, somewhat overcast spring evening, and I was roaming the stadium collecting fan survey data with a long-sleeved tshirt underneath my official Momentum "Staff" shirt. As the electronic board above the field counting down to the game's start reached 0, I sat in an empty yellow seat in the stands to watch kickoff. The

team's announcer Darius boomed out a pre-game tribute to WUSA, the first women's pro league.

Around 10 former WUSA players were present, and they walked out onto the field to loud

applause as their names were called individually. They each had one or two official WPS soccer

balls to throw out to the fans, and children jumped out of their seats and lined the railing, hoping

for a ball. The WUSA players all looked to be in their 30s, and were dressed casually in jeans,

tank tops, and tshirts. They walked along the field casually, big grins on their faces, enjoying the

attention.

The glorification of 1999 and WUSA-era players as pioneers forging a path for women's

professional soccer was not restricted to the Momentum or even to WPS, but was a narrative

repeatedly frequently within mass media. The supposed triumph of women's sport as a result of

the 1999 Women's World Cup had been institutionalized to the extent that it was how the current

league (WPS) was understood and framed by various media outlets. For instance, two non-

Momentum WPS players, both also on the Women's National Team, sat down for an interview

with a local FOX News affiliate prior to the start of the 2011 season. Both players wore jeans

and brightly colored team jackets, but had their long hair down. They sat on stools in front of a

male interviewer, also on a stool, and the three held microphones in their hands. After joking

with the pair about what they had done with their Olympic medals from 2008, the interviewer

asked, "I'm curious, too, how much were you guys, when you were younger obviously, at the

time, you know the '96 Olympic team, and then the '99 World Cup team with the Mia Hamms

and the Brandi Chastains and that group. How much of an influence did they have with you, and

can you point to them and say hey, that's the reason I got into soccer?" The older of the two

players, a veteran of the national team and captain of her WPS team, nodded in response. She

said, "Yeah, they were huge. You know, growing up and watching them, and them being my

idols growing up. And then I had the opportunity to play with Kristine Lilly, Mia Hamm, Joy Fawcett in 2003-2004. To play with Kristine Lilly and have her now as a good friend and mentor, I mean, we can't thank them enough for what they've done." The media narrative of "the '99ers" was also taken up in advertisement of the 2011 Women's World Cup, which took place mid-summer several months into the WPS season. ESPN ran one commercial almost on repeat. The commercial featured a close up on the face and torso of Abby Wambach, star forward and veteran on the squad. Abby talked about how disappointing it was to her that she had not yet won a World Cup. As Abby spoke, the screen moved away from her to show footage of the 1999 Women's World Cup final game against China. Abby concluded that the U.S. was committed to building on the legacy of the 1999 team in the 2011 tournament.

In summary of this chapter, I argue that WPS staff and league allies were acutely aware of the unique developmental history of soccer in the U.S. This history has produced complex configurations of cultural meaning that situate the game differently across age, gender, race/ethnicity, and class. Rather than one set of meanings displacing another over time, the game of soccer in the contemporary U.S. possess multiple, often contradictory meanings. On the one hand, the game has emerged as the top participation sport for youth, and among white, class privileged girls in particular. The stereotype of the "soccer mom" speaks to the ways that soccer has become tied to suburban, wealthy communities in the U.S. On the other hand, elite soccer has long been the purview of men, and predominantly of non-white and immigrant men. Associations of soccer with "foreign-ness" persist and are continually created in context of changing demographic patterns, national political debates, and localized team and league dynamics.

Given the complexity of soccer's gendered meanings and structures, an organization for women's play at the elite level is by definition caught between both youth sport and professional sport fields. Those who are dedicated to building women's professional soccer readily acknowledge the tensions inherent in the project of this league, and build their expectations for the league in relation to the challenges of its presence in dual social fields. Those who worked for WPS knew that the league faced a serious uphill climb because of soccer's marginalized status compared to The Big Four, and because women's sports are marginalized compared to men's sports. At the same time, many felt that the U.S.' sports landscape presented opportunities for women's soccer that did not exist for other sports. The "exceptionalism" accorded women's soccer was "proven" in the enormous successes of the U.S. Women's National Team since the early 1990s. The trope of "the '99ers" was taken up not only by the WPS staff I interviewed, but by local and national media outlets as the dominant frame for making sense of women's soccer. The accomplishments of the '99ers were to be celebrated, as they provided evidence of the viability and marketability of the sport and its players, viability many hoped would translate into the same success for the national league.

Ultimately, the same individuals expressed a sense of both struggle and optimism for the league's longevity. A strong sense of uncertainty pervaded the talk of those I spoke to. As we will see in the following chapter, this sense of uncertainty did not remain in talk, but extended into the organization of the work of building and selling WPS teams. The dual location of WPS and the Momentum in youth sport and professional sport teams created divergent sets of ideas around what "success" looked like and how it was to be achieved.

IX. BUSINESS OR CAUSE? GENDER AND CONTESTED INSTITUTIONAL LOGICS

A. **<u>Introduction</u>**

After the season ended for the Momentum in August 2011, the team's owner closed the office on a Friday, giving the staff a day off. As we had all worked long hours and many weekends during the season, this was a welcome development. Jordan, the Momentum's manager of corporate sponsors and community programs, texted me early on that sunny afternoon to ask if I wanted to join her for a hike. As we tromped uphill on the local mountain a short time later, Jordan told me she felt the atmosphere in the office had been more positive since the recent departure of two male staff members. One, who worked in ticket sales, had left at the end of the regular season to work for another company. The other, an assistant coach, finance officer, and right hand man to the owner, had left to pursue an advanced degree. Now, Jordan noted, "it's just us girls," a reference to the all-female staff that remained. She commented that because the former financial officer possessed a finance background, he was solely focused on the "bottom line." Jordan told me that he had been the owner's constant companion, feeding him what she deemed to be "negative information" about the team's financials almost constantly. Now that he was gone, she said, the owner was clearly more positive and happy, and "he realized that the office actually runs pretty smoothly!" Jordan shook her head about the entire situation. "You know," she concluded, "There are some things you just can't measure."

Jordan's comments in this post-season moment capture the tensions between two institutional logics that were at play within the team throughout the 2011 season. On the one hand is "business" logic, the dominant logic in the sport field, which is centrally concerned with generating profit for owners and investors in the league. On the other hand is a "cause" logic which privileges building a positive, emotion-laden experience beyond the measurable. This

logic has roots in liberal feminist ideas about sport as a source of women's empowerment, as well as feminist activist successes in opening sport to girls' and women's participation. These logics present fundamentally different conceptions of what the primary goals of this women's soccer organization are, the strategies staff should use to meet these goals, and the nature of the larger social and cultural environment in which the league operates.

These logics serve as narratives available for organizational members to take up in shaping and explaining action. However, these logics are not gender neutral, but spell out unique visions of the sociocultural space for women in sport. While business logic proposes a level playing field for female athletes and argues that the league competes on equal footing with men's sport in the larger sport market, cause advocates make a case for discrimination against and marginalization of women in sport, and argue that a core part of the team's purpose is to address these inequalities. A second way in which these logics are gendered is in the ways they are taken up by organizational members with differing amounts of power, patterns that map alongside the gender composition of the team itself. Here there are clear patterns, with women more likely to take up cause rhetoric, and men business logic. Such patterns reflect the contradictory demands the external environment presents to women's sport. The Momentum must navigate the extreme commercialization of professional sport, which compels it to adopt the language and practices of business, but also the institutionalized gains made by the feminist movement in increasing opportunities for sport participation among girls and women. Making this environment yet more complicated is the recent adoption of a liberal feminist "cause" agenda by corporations, such as Nike, who seek to capitalize on women's increased sport participation to boost the bottom line (Heywood and Dworkin, 2003). In the larger sport, corporate and media contexts they are embedded in, then, business and cause logics are sometimes conceived of as mutually exclusive,

but at other times as complementary, particularly given that new ideas about corporate social responsibility (CSR) and cause-related marketing (CRM) increasingly pervade formal organizations. Further, this chapter shows that gender itself is a source of contestation within women's sport organizations, as the nature of the contemporary "playing field" for their work is continually debated.

Jordan's debriefing of the season presents the major findings of this chapter. First, the existence of and tension between dual logics within the team, one focused on the bottom line, and the other stressing the less measurable impact of the team, consistent with "empowering" players and (female) fans. Second, Jordan hints at the gendered nature of organizational logics, as tension between business and cause logics revolves around the nature of (in)equality for contemporary female athletes. Finally, that tensions between the two logics mapped along the lines of employee social location, although not always neatly, with staff embracing one or the other centrally. My focus on dual institutional logics during one season of the Momentum's existence documents the struggles of team and league members to assert an organizational identity as women's professional soccer got off the ground.

B. **Business Logic**

It is perhaps obvious to state that professional sport is big business in the U.S. In 2011, the Big Four of men's professional football, basketball, baseball, and ice hockey combined for $25.6 billion in annual revenue (Gaines, 2011). The scale of this profit is driven by lucrative television and corporate partnerships, in tandem with ticket and merchandise sales. While the growing influence of commercial interests in sport has been increasingly criticized in recent years by scholars and fans alike, and a vibrant sport reform

movement is active across sport contexts (Benford, 2007), those working to build and sell women's soccer do not share these concerns. Rather than critique the influence of corporate and media interests in professional sport, overwhelming commercialization is so integral to social positioning in the field that it has become highly desirable for those working in sport, and necessary to legitimized entrance into the sport field. Media and commercial partnerships have become the dominant forms of economic capital operating in the sport field.

As a professional sport organization, the Momentum was subject to the demands of this highly commercialized, corporatized sport field. The dominant "business" logic of sport posits profit to be the central goal of sport, with television deals, corporate relationships and ticket sales as the primary drivers of profit. This business logic had circulated within women's professional soccer since the operation of the Women's United Soccer Association (WUSA), the first professional league for women, which played through 2003. Assessments of this league's folding focused unanimously on WUSA's "business model," suggesting that the combination of too much money spent and not enough money generated sunk the league at the conclusion of its third season. With little prompting, multiple interview participants mentioned this narrative of WUSA's failure. Joseph, who had volunteered for the Momentum for two years, noted that, "WUSA failed because they thought they were bigger than they were. And a couple of years later, $100 million dollars in debt, they realized "Oh my God, we can't do this."" The notion that significant financial losses spelled WUSA's demise was so familiar that Vincent, manager of an east coast WPS team, called it the "official story line." He said, "So the sort of official story line of the WUSA, no matter who you talk to, people at WPS, or people at *Sports Business Journal*, the official line of the WUSA is always going to be that they spent a hundred million dollars in three years, they're so wasteful, and they had squandered it."

This concern over WUSA's business model carried past the league's folding in 2003, and was a key point of debate when a new league began to take form several years later. At the time of WPS' founding, women's soccer insiders asserted a commitment to fixing the perceived flaws of the business model of the earlier generation. In a media interview prior to WPS' launch in 2009, one team's General Manager made the case that, "The WUSA didn't fail across the board. It just failed as a business. On the field the product was terrific. WPS's challenge is to retain that success on the field, but also correct the mistakes on the business side." Tanya, a manager for the Momentum in 2010, argued that, "When they did WPS, it was supposed to be how do you make changes from the WUSA and why it folded, and obviously the financials were done, the amount of money." As these quotes show, WPS crafted an early identity based in part around what it was *not* – a league (like WUSA) that would lose large sums of money for owners and investors.

WPS organizers created a "slimmed down approach," as one journalist wrote in a 2009 article for the soccer website PitchInvasion.com, a direct comparison between the amount of money WUSA and WPS expected to spend in their early years of operation. In March of that year, the *Washington Post* also picked up on WPS' tweaked business model, noting, "They've pledged not to spend as indiscriminately as the Women's United Soccer Association, which sunk amid massive losses in just 3 seasons." Thus Women's Professional Soccer was founded amid a newly (re)articulated commitment to the goal of profit generation through maximizing revenue and minimizing expenditure. WPS as a nascent organization was distinguished from its predecessor by a new business model that would sure to produce better gains for league owners and investors. As the Momentum joined the league in its second year of play, they came into a context of an already-dominant business logic that stressed the bottom line. In fact, following WPS' first year of play, prior to the Momentum's kick off, the central office eliminated its

marketing department as a cost-saving mechanism. A *Sports Business Journal* article in 2010 covering this decision wrote that, "The owners plan to eliminate national marketing campaigns and concentrate on local marketing campaigns next season." This move was a clear message from the league office to its teams that cost-saving measures were paramount, even if their consequence was that entire areas of operation, such as marketing, were eliminated.

As they entered the league, the Momentum took up a business logic focus on profit and measurable gains. Even prior to the 2011 season, owner Steve was clear that the Momentum office was focused on measurable, profit-focused outcomes. For instance, in the 2009 media conference announcing details about the team, one reporter asked Steve how he would measure the success of their first season. In response, Steve listed four measures of success: season ticket sales, overall attendance, sponsorships, and team performance. As an existing (though limited) league television deal with Fox Soccer precluded television efforts at the team level, Steve defined success through ticket sales and sponsor dollars. Although he included team performance as a benchmark prior to the Momentum's first season, as we will see, this focus later gave way to practices driven by bottom line considerations.

The Momentum entered a league that defined itself through low-budget operations and a quest for revenue generation; they also entered at a moment when marketing was de-emphasized in favor of sponsor and ticket revenue. This mandate to seek profit, however, also emerged from pressures outside of the league itself, such as Big Four men's professional teams, corporations and local businesses, and employees' training in sport business programs. First, the Momentum staff were highly engaged in the larger sport field and attuned to events within men's Big Four sport. For instance, the office held a subscription to the *Sport Business Journal*, and each issue was carefully and collectively pored over for insight. One post-season issue in the Fall of 2011

covered NHL (men's hockey) players' suggestions for league sales and marketing, and sparked a major debate among the women in the office about the importance and feasibility of player feedback. One staff member had ESPN as their Internet browser's home page, and the women I shared an office space with (Jordan and media manager Grace) often perused such general sport websites, in addition to league sites and social media, such as Twitter. Men's professional sport leagues were a constant presence in both print and online media, and served as an ongoing reminder of and reference point for the type of successes the Momentum sought. Ronald acknowledged the influence of Big Four sport in referencing the ubiquity of advertisement in the NFL. He commented, "The first down is brought to you by Nextel. The first down marker is brought to you by" – it has really become an advertiser-oriented, advertiser-driven thing".

The feeling that Big Four teams were a model of success to emulate was evidence of an overwhelming acceptance of the corporate model of sport. Chris, a Momentum ticket manager, made a local college football team a point of reference, contrasting their attendance with the Momentum's. He said, "Everybody in the south, southeast, all they think about is college football. [Local university], well, they don't have to think about filling the stadium. They just open the doors." Desire to emulate Big Four successes was not restricted to the Momentum. Courtney, a high-level manager for a west coast WPS team who had worked in women's soccer since the 1999 Women's World Cup, told me "The owners, they would go to an [NFL] game and come back and be like "Hey, we just went to an [NFL] game and it was sold out! Why can't we be sold out!" And I was like if you're expecting me to do that, one I'm the wrong person for this job, because I can't do it, and nobody else can do it, either."

Pressure toward commercialization also came from the corporate world. Keith, a reporter who covered the league, noted this influence in arguing that, "Corporations and business people

run this league." One local corporation in 2011 was considering becoming a sponsor of the Momentum, but wanted to know how many additional units of their product (here, a food item) they could expect to sell as a result of their sponsorship. Despite the existence of league-wide sponsor deals with national corporations, such as Puma, the money these partnerships generated went to the league, leaving individual teams to hammer out local sponsor deals independently. For 2011, the Momentum had partnerships with many local and regional businesses, some of which were revenue-generating, and some of which were not. Their single largest sponsor deal was with a regional hospital system, and the team was highly responsive to the demands of this sponsor. For example, the sponsor dictated Momentum appearances at several summer community events; Jordan told me offhand during an appearance at a local charity event that "when Care Mark says "jump," we say "how high?"" Corporate influence was also present in finance officer Rich's office, where a photocopy of a diagram from the popular finance book *Good to Great* hung from a bookshelf filled with finance, accounting, and business books as a daily reminder of the Momentum's goals. This book suggests strategies for companies wanting to move from "good" to "great," greatness defined through profit and a rising corporate profile.

Finally, the university sport management programs that some WPS employees graduated from placed a strong emphasis on profit generation and sport business models, stressing financial profit over the social and cultural issues present in sport. While Jordan criticized the team's financial officer's educational background for leading him to obsess over numbers, she herself was a recent graduate from a regional public university's sport management program, and kept several of her college textbooks lined up on her desk. During a slow afternoon in the office in May, she gave me her sport marketing textbook to read, telling me that I should find the knowledge it contained interesting for my research. The first chapter of this book opens with a

vignette about Jeep's marketing research efforts with its customers. I read that Jeep had recently

collected consumer marketing data in innovative ways, through "such activities as off-road

driving clinics, fly fishing contests, and hiking and mountain-biking competitions." The chapter

continued by linking this data to the brand's financial success, arguing, "According to Jeep sales

research, owners who participate in sponsored activities are four times more likely to purchase

another Jeep than are owners who do not participate."

In our interview over dinner well after the season had ended, I asked Jordan about her

education in sport management. Jordan said that, "It was very well rounded. We learned a lot

about financial business models, free agency models, the league structures of the Big Four, the

history of it, you know." Jordan was not alone among Momentum staff in possessing a sport-

related degree. Dillon, a paid intern for the Momentum in 2010 and 2011, was currently finishing

an undergraduate degree with a major in sport business. When I asked him the types of things he

studied as part of his training, he emphasized calculating the amount of money fans spend in

stadiums. Dillon said,

> "We – we look at like the FCI, which is the Family Consumption – Family Consumption
> Index, which is like what the average four-person family spends at a game. Because the
> FCI takes into account just as you like buy two adult tickets, two children's tickets, four
> soft drinks, two beers, four hot dogs and two hats. Which is unrealistic for every person
> coming to every game, but like you look at the Momentum, when we get fans in, we get
> at least, you know they usually buy a popcorn, then get a tee shirt, maybe they wanna get
> a soccer ball. So like it varies but that's kind of like the average that they set it up. And I
> think the FCI right now, like for baseball, a family of four spends $70.00."

If profit emerged from selling the team to media, corporations and fans, successful selling

hinged upon external perception of the value of investing in the team. The notion of value within

women's sport was communicated through the term "return on investment," or ROI, a concept I

heard mentioned frequently throughout the season by staff, fans, and media reporters. The

concept of "ROI" suggested that external actors, be they individuals or institutions, would buy

into the team if WPS was able to successfully present the value of this investment. For instance,

a June 2009 *Sport Business Journal* article on WPS quoted the head of a soccer marketing

organization as saying, "For a new property, they [WPS] have to develop that relevancy and

value proposition for the corporate world and it takes time to do that." While "value" can be

defined in many ways, the definition of value as "ROI" gave the term a decidedly quantitative

focus. As the example of the potential sponsor who wanted an estimate of the increased sales

they could expect from sponsorship demonstrates, ROI meant numbers. This understanding of

"value" as quantitative return is also a part of processes of commercialization and corporate

influence that pervade professional sport. I interviewed Jerome, the manager of corporate

sponsors for the city's Major League Baseball team after the Momentum reached out to this team

for advice. When I asked him how he defined the success of a corporate partnership, Jerome

responded,

> "Ultimately, however they evaluate the return on success is what we've got to succeed with. So if you tell me this is just branding and imaging; we're just trying to get the message out, I build something for that. If you're telling me that this campaign has to move Coke Zero off the shelf, then I create something that gives you access to the millions of fans that we have coming in, the print we can reach, the people online it will reach. We can create a call to action so that we can force people to go to stores to buy Coke Zero which then will move them off the shelf which gives them a percentage of sales increase. So it's critical for us to understand what and how they will value every opportunity so that we can deliver exactly what they need so that when we go back – what we do a tremendous job of is we document the entire process."

Jerome's comment here makes several important relationships clear. First, that the

perceived value of sport sponsorship in Big Four leagues is largely numerical, existing in "a

percentage of sales increase" and moving particular products "off the shelf." And second, that

various forms of documentation are how a team "delivers" this value to sponsors. The need to

not only create, but document a measurable ROI, particularly to sponsors and media, was

paramount to the Momentum. ROI for fans was assumed to exist in the low price of tickets, and

efforts on this front existed in communicating this value through the weekly email newsletter, the team's website and social media accounts, and phone calls made by Chris and Kendall, the two ticket salespeople.

C.   **The Gender of Business Logic**

If a business logic emphasizing profit generation was dominant in the highly commercial sport environment the Momentum found themselves in, this logic was not taken up equally by all Momentum staff. The four male paid staff members present throughout the season -- owner Steve, finance officer Rich, ticket manager Chris, and consultant Sasha -- expressed a strong commitment to profit and to practices believed to contribute to revenue generation. Steve and Rich both made frequent informal comments during daily office operating hours, staff meetings, and game days that communicated both the importance and difficulty of revenue generation to the organization's practices. The issue of team finances was so persistent a topic for informal comment that it was how I was introduced to Steve during my first full day with the team. Early in the morning, I was sitting with the Momentum's office manager, Sandra, a woman with short, auburn hair and bright red lipstick. When Steve entered the room, I shook his hand as Sandra introduced me. Then, Sandra asked Steve to sign several of the bill payments lying in a pile on her desk. As he quickly scribbled his name, Steve looked at me and sighed. "Easy come, easy go," he commented, nodding his head. Steve also concluded the majority of staff meetings in 2011 by slapping his hands onto the table in front of him and barking, "Let's go sell tickets!"

At one staff meeting during the season several months after my introduction to the team, group discussion centered on the upcoming home game against a well-known opponent with several Women's National Team players made highly visible by the Women's World Cup. Jordan

suggested that we could capitalize on these players' visibility by selling one players' signature headband. She said this could "generate revenue." At her comment, Steve laughed loudly. "There is no revenue at the Momentum!" he crowed, "Once you find it, let me know." Rich, Steve's confidant and the team's finance officer, often echoed Steve's comments about money. In a staff meeting at the stadium prior to our early July home game, Steve informed the group there would be fireworks after the game. Sitting on tall black barstool next to Steve, Rich joked in a low voice "that's a lot of money exploding," and a few others present giggled. Such informal comments made by Steve and Rich, men possessing the greatest power and authority on the team, communicated a daily message about the importance of making money, and contributed to an atmosphere in which the potential profit from organizational practices and actions was valued over other goals and consequences.

Chris, the ticket manager who left at the end of the regular season, approached the work of selling tickets with an eye for profit. He was a staunch and vocal opponent of a mid-season attempt to fill the stands through giving away many tickets for free, a strategy engineered by Steve and Rich after several weeks of lower than expected attendance. In early May, Chris left his solo office to step across the hall into the room occupied by Jordan, media manager Grace, and myself. "I wish people wanted to buy tickets!" he exclaimed loudly, barely able to contain his anger. "The funny thing is," he continued, "Let's say this works. Let's say we get 8,000 people. If each of those spends $3 each, we'll still be making less money than at any other game this season!" In Chris' opinion, a smaller crowd was better if it resulted in more money generated.

Perhaps the best example of the Momentum's adoption of business logic was the introduction of Sasha as a pro-bono consultant to the team. An imposingly tall white man with

greying hair and a round face, Sasha was brought in by Steve in the middle of the 2011 season. As he introduced Sasha at a staff meeting, Steve told us that Sasha was here to "look our organization from top to bottom" to see what we could improve to become more successful. Sasha, who had extensive experience with men's and women's soccer leagues in Europe, interviewed all paid staff the week following his entrance. His initiatives with the team became twofold – increasing sponsor revenue through new partnerships, and boosting ticket sales and attendance. Sasha set a goal of 10,000 tickets sold the remainder of the season, a goal communicated verbally to the entire staff. The week after Sasha's entrance, I arrived at the office early, and met Jordan in the parking lot. As we climbed the expansive set of wooden stairs up to the main office hallway, we noticed large white pieces of paper taped to the outsides of each office door. They read:

1, - - - sold

9, - - - to go

The papers referenced the team's progress toward the 10,000 ticket sales goal, and were periodically updated, although invisibly, as if by magic. A few weeks later, I arrived at the office in the morning to find "Sell more tickets!" and "Sell more corporate partnerships!" scrawled across the papers in Steve's handwriting. No formal reference was ever made to the papers, but they served as a constant visual reminder that Steve and Sasha saw increasing paid attendance (and sponsorships) as a central goal for the second half of the season.

A second way in which business logic was gendered existed in the implications and assumptions of the logic itself as it became defined within women's soccer. As I worked more

closely with Jordan throughout the season than with any other paid staff member, I saw firsthand how the value of women's soccer was defined and assessed when it came to sponsors. During our initial meeting on my first day in the Momentum office, Jordan told me that she wanted my larger project with the team to communicate ROI to sponsors and "oversell" their investment. Jordan told me that this could include information from the fan survey I was to conduct, but also things like news articles, photos, or edited video clips. Although my work with the team quickly evolved to include a number of projects, other Momentum interns and I worked on this "ROI project" intermittently throughout the season. For instance, the final home game of the season in early August found me roaming the stadium with Jordan's digital camera in hand, having been given a printed list of sponsors whose presence in the stadium I needed to document. "*Over*sell," Jordan emphasized to me, "*Over*sell and *over*deliver."

Jordan's desire to go above and beyond in demonstrating value to sponsors suggests the ways the ROI definition of value contains gendered meanings. Defining value as ROI suggests that women's soccer is and will be evaluated by potential investors (owners, fans, sponsors and media outlets) on the basis of a level playing field in the larger sport environment. Those who most strongly adopted a market-based approach to women's soccer also argued that gender equality operated in the world of professional sport. Equality in this case was defined through the liberal feminist notion of participation opportunity – that women's participation in sport had skyrocketed in recent decades, and especially in soccer, indicated that women possessed equal opportunity to play soccer at all levels. Overt bias and discrimination, then, did not hinder WPS from fair competition in the free market. Both Joseph and Carl, a longtime fan and season ticket holder with the Momentum, made the case for women's equality in sport. Joseph referenced his

past support for women's sport as evidence that equal treatment of male and female athletes was

how "it's always been." He said,

> "I guess as far as the equalities, I was brought up that way. My sisters played sports.
> And in the way we were taught in Indiana is the women's sports bringing in state
> champion is no different than we were whether it was track, cross country, swimming,
> tennis, whatever. I mean, it was viable. As a five sport athlete in high school, I supported
> the women's basketball and track and cross country. I mean, I support them not just
> because they were my friends. It's the right thing to do whether you're a man, woman, or
> whatever. Sport should be treated equal – and that's just the way it's always been."

Similarly, Carl argued that the representation of women in sport as athletes and coaches

had been growing in recent decades, evidence of growing equality in sport. When I asked Carl

what it would take for WPS as a league to be successful, he replied, "I think time and patience.

You have a whole generation now of women who have played sports. It's not unusual to have

played some kind of sport activity. It's gradually phasing in. You start to see, finally, women

coaches. Cause for a long time in youth sports, women coaches were not available. And now it's

becoming more common at the high school and college levels and everything else."

Given the assumption of a fair and free sport market in which men's and women's

leagues compete for attention and dollars on equal footing, business logic holds that the potential

ROI delivered by women's professional sport is directly compared to that delivered by men's

professional sport, and investment decisions are made on the basis of who delivers more,

quantitatively speaking. Corporate and media entities were perceived to be reluctant to invest in

a product with an inferior ROI to other alternatives. As Jerome notes, the "reach" of his Major

League Baseball team to fans is extensive, with "millions" of people available for corporations to

market to. Chris argued that the comparatively small reach of the Momentum meant that

corporations would be less likely to invest in sponsoring the team than in other forms of

marketing. He said, "It's advertising the market is all the same things to the companies. How

many people are going to be there, so how many people are we touching. Your stadium holds 8,000, let's just say you're full, 16,000 sets of eyeballs see my message. I can put up a billboard for one day and get more traction and spend less money." In fact, there were many instances of media and corporate organizations rejecting WPS on the basis of its small scale. Joseph told me that when one WPS team had been in danger of folding in 2010, he had used his personal contacts in business to argue for corporate investment in the team. Joseph explained, "But I mean, I literally I took out of my own money a flight up to [city], grabbed my brother, and grabbed some of his investors. And he pulled over all his $5 million and above clients into a meeting, and I pitched it. And said "What can you do to help?" And it came to "It's women's soccer, Joe. It's not viable." I said "That's not a good enough answer!"" As another example, one soccer journalist, in a post written for an online soccer community, argued that the lack of female athletes on *Forbes'* annual "Celebrity 100" list was evidence for their inferior marketability and ROI-potential compared to men. He wrote,

> "The highest ranked female athlete in recent years was Russian tennis player Maria Sharapova (ranked 62 out of 100 with estimated earnings of $18.2 million). Female athletes on average comprise five entries in the top 100; men accounted for an average of 20 entries. No female soccer player is featured on the most recent lists. In comparison, both David Beckham and Brazilian star Ronaldo appear regularly. The implication from the above is that stakeholders associated with women's soccer need to produce a coherent argument for why investors should invest in a product that has relatively little media interest and profile outside of major tournaments."

Low levels of investment in women's soccer were justified and naturalized through dual beliefs: first, a belief that full equality had been achieved for women's sport, and second, a belief in biological essentialism that links lower ROI potential directly to the supposed biological inferiority of women's bodies. Given a firm belief that equality had been achieved for women in sport, the lower ROI-potential of women's soccer relative to men's sport is not a function of social and contextual factors, such as the comparative newness of the league, significantly lower

player salaries, decreased training time or outright bias and discrimination of the part of media.

Instead, women's soccer was argued to be perceived as inferior to men's sport based on biology,

with the result that the women's game was less interesting and exciting to potential fans,

sponsors and writers. Although few of my study participants expressed belief in what Michael

Messner (2011) terms "hard essentialism," many argued that wider cultural perceptions of

female athletes revolved around binary, essentialized notions of physical ability. For instance,

Ronald noted that, "I mean, men are always considered to be more competitive, bigger, stronger,

faster, and therefore, worth watching in their competition." Local business owner and

Momentum sponsor Nathan echoed Ronald, agreeing that, "Comparatively, yeah, I mean, I guess

it's something that anybody says or that I hear said, that you watch a man's game of soccer

versus the woman's game of soccer, the speed is like half. It doesn't come out as exciting."

Raymond, who had covered men's and women's soccer for several decades on his

popular news website, best demonstrated the links between beliefs in equality and essentialism in

talking about the value of women's soccer. He said,

> "And that [cause-related marketing] is something that has been, I think, a huge, huge
> mistake in marketing women's sport, not just soccer, but women's sports in general. I'm
> not saying that women's right or civil rights or any of these causes in the '60s or the '70s
> weren't important, that's not the case, but you can't market a product that way. Title IX
> gave equal opportunity to women to play sports in high school, in college, in places that
> were receiving some kind of federal money. And it was certainly a great thing for
> women's sports, and for women, and it needed to happen. But saying that legally do I
> have the right to play basketball in high school or in college the same way that boys do is
> not the same as making a living doing it. You don't have a right to make a living doing
> anything. So you could be the best women's soccer player in the world, but the same
> number of people are not gonna pay to see you because they're gonna pay to see Lionel
> Messi. And you don't have a right to be paid the same kind of money as Lionel Messi.
> So we go back to the thing that I said before about equal work for equal pay. They're not
> the same. So it's the market value.

Raymond's comment is an ideal-type illustration of the gendered nature of business logic writ large. Raymond makes the case that while social movement efforts to increase women's participation opportunities in sport were important in an earlier era, these efforts had largely been successful, and equality of opportunity achieved. At the same time, the larger sport marketplace is not (and should not) be subject to mandated equality of the sort legislated by Title IX – here, men and women, and the leagues they play in, must compete for resources on the supposed level playing field of the market. If women lose out to men, this is the fair result of lower interest in women's soccer. Lower interest in this case derives from inferior quality of play, as Raymond asserts that no female player could be as skilled as male star Lionel Messi. Ultimately, explaining the lower returns to women's soccer, compared to men's sport, with reference to the concept of "market value" portrays professional sport as a gender-neutral space in which supposed binary biological sex distinctions lead to disparate levels of investment in sport leagues for women and men.

In sum, the business logic prioritizes profit generation as the ultimate goal of the Momentum as an organization. This logic suggests that creating and communicating "ROI" is the primary method of generating investment, and thus profit. However, this logic is decisively gendered both in its underlying assumptions and in the way it is taken up predominantly by men. This logic holds that the pursuit of profit and ROI occurs in conditions of full market equality because women and men possess equal opportunity to participate in sport at all levels. Given a level playing field, the lack of media and corporate attention women's sport receives compared to men is not a cause of their marginalization that contributes to ongoing gender inequality in sport. Instead, lack of attention stems directly from women's own inferiority as soccer players. While very few WPS employees believed strongly in the physical inferiority of women's soccer

players compared to men, many felt that this belief was part of the operation of the wider sport market in the U.S., and that their teams and players were continually evaluated through an essentialist lens.

D.   **Cause Logic**

In contrast to business logic was a cause logic that held the primary goal of the team and league was to empower girls and women through providing opportunity and role modeling in soccer. WPS as an organization existed to open opportunities for women in sport, whether for players, administrators, coaches, or referees. That an organization dedicated to supporting and furthering the careers of female athletes existed meant that younger generations of girl athletes could develop new dreams of athletic futures and see female role models in professional team sport. Successful empowerment of girls and women is defined not as quantitative measurement, but as emotion, as feelings such as excitement, hope, and confidence were evidence that team goals were being achieved. At the conclusion of one late-season home game, Jordan had been assigned to walk with one visiting team Women's National Team star as she signed autographs for fans. At the post-game pizza party, Jordan told me that a young girl had asked the star, "Can I have your headband?" The player had immediately pulled it off her head and handed it down. Smiling, Jordan said that she had been floored. "It was such a small thing to her," she told me, "Just a sweaty piece of pre-wrap. But I saw that girl's eyes. It meant so much to her." Courtney, who began working in women's soccer for the 1999 Women's World Cup, argued that, "I think we [WUSA organizers] always went back to the whole we are great role models for young girls. This isn't actually in the market – there are not any strong female role models. So here's an opportunity to take your daughter and your son to a game to see women in the sport.

That was a big piece of what we sold. And I believe in it. People say "Oh, that's so done." But that is a big piece of it. That's what differentiates us from other sports."

The cause logic derives from liberal feminist scholarship and activism in sport, work that has long prioritized participation opportunity as the epitome of gender equality for female athletes. The ways in which the cause logic operates is evidence of the enormous successes of liberal feminism in sport. First, that participation and role modeling have become central goals for women's sport. Curtis, a season ticket holder and head of a regional youth soccer program, argued that the existence of WPS and the proximity of the Momentum to his home were important because the team provided role models for his daughters. He said, "Like I said, it's mostly my middle daughter. I think it's really important. A lot of boys have team sports heroes, football, basketball, whatever, and I think it's an important part of growing up, to have people that you look up to, and you try to emulate them. And I think up until recently, most women's professional sports were individual sports, so golf, things like that. And I think that girls miss a lot of that." Jessie, a journalist who had covered the league since 2009, also argued that the league was centrally about opportunities for women in sport. She argued,

> "And in that I think that might be the first time in woman's sport history where that has to be the case. Fully professional, fully independent sports league for women that can prove to be sustainable and popular enough to continue, to kind of go on. So we've gotten sort of a feminist movement. And it provides them [women] opportunities. Not only in the soccer fields, but also in management and behind the scenes and coaching and just the whole coach or all around woman soccer team. And all the jobs need to be filled."

In May, early in the 2011 season, Jordan received a phone call in her cubicle during which she mostly listened. From my adjacent cubicle, I heard her say "I'm meeting with the girls tomorrow." When she hung up, she stood and grinned at me over the partition between our spaces. "I have a letter for you to write!" she exclaimed. The man on the phone was a youth soccer coach in Minnesota. He wanted the Momentum to write a letter to his young girls' team,

the Jujubees. The tone, Jordan told me, should be "Girls rule, anything-you-can-do-I-can-do-better". She wrote those exact words on a sticky note along with the man's mailing address, and slapped it down on my desk. "Anything you can do, I can do better" were song lyrics accompanying a famous Gatorade commercial that aired in the 1990s. The commercial, called "Michael vs. Mia," featured women's soccer star Mia Hamm competing against basketball legend Michael Jordan in multiple sporting events. At the conclusion of the commercial, Mia flips Michael onto his back on a judo mat; she has won out over her competitor. This commercial and its playfully adversarial tone had become so well known a message of women's sporting prowess that Jordan invoked this theme without direct acknowledgment of the source of her idea. The letter the Momentum sent to the Jujubees, revised several times that day with Jordan's guidance, was a wholesale embrace of liberal feminism in sport. The letter, signed by the Momentum players before being mailed, read as follows:

Dear Jujubees,

*Just a few years ago in 2007, the total number of school-aged girls participating in organized sport totaled more than **3 million** for the first time in history! The story of girls and women in sport, and in soccer specifically, is a story of a growing number of players, teams, and leagues nation-wide. You are each part of an amazing and historic trend that has and will forever change the face of sport in the United States.*

Sometimes, people try to put us down and say that boys are better soccer players. But we know this just is not true! Anyone who has ever seen us Momentum players sprint down the sideline or cross the ball for a hard header into the goal knows that women are just as awesome and talented as any men. Girls rule! Have you ever seen the documentary Kick Like a Girl? This movie follows the true story of a girls' soccer team

in Utah that was so good, they played older girls' and boys' leagues and still never lost!

Amazing!

Jujubees, there is nothing that you can't do if you work hard and believe in your dreams and your abilities. Take it from us – when we were younger, we played in youth leagues all over the country just like you, dreaming of a future which would include a women's professional league. Now, we spend every day playing the game we love! The world in front of you is wide open with enormous possibility, both inside and outside of sport. We wish you the best of luck in your upcoming games, and expect to hear great things out of Minnesota.

Keep playing, and keep dreaming!

Those who embraced a cause approach to their work argued that while the team was certainly a business and that profit was a goal, the business approach was of secondary importance compared to the goals of role modeling and providing opportunity. I interviewed Grace and Kendall, a Momentum ticket manager, over a sushi lunch at the end of the season. The three of us had a lively discussion about the larger goals of WPS as a league. When I asked Grace about the goals of WPS, she acknowledged profit, but placed it lower in its significance to "empowerment." Grace argued,

> "We see it [WPS] as women's empowerment. We're about women competing and being competitive in sports. It's about Title IX, there's equality there. The changes Title IX has made cannot be undone. But it's also about the competitive nature of sport, recognizing the positives of sport and creating a model for future generations. It's an idealistic landscape, in that the ultimate goal is opportunity. Well, the ultimate goal is to generate revenue. But ultimately, it's for people who love the game and want to be a part of it, as a player, fan, employee, media person covering the game. We're here to provide opportunity for people to get involved who love the game."

At Grace's debate over the "ultimate" purpose of women's pro soccer, Kendall chimed in

to support the assertion that the team was about far more than revenue generation. Kendall said,

> "I get really annoyed when I hear about "making money," because it shouldn't be about making money. Maybe we'll break even, at best. Because if we're "making money," then it really needs to go to our players. None of the players are paid very much, some of them are making $10,000. And not even many of the men's pro teams actually make any money. Sure, they're big budget, and they make millions of dollars, but they pay millions of dollars to their players! So I don't think our focus should be on making money, or at least making money for the owners. They have to know that they signed up to lose up to $2 million per season for 5 years, and this is what to expect."

The rejection of a business logic focus on profit for ownership was repeated many times by those committed to cause-related goals. Jordan and I had many conversations about the potential sponsor who wanted a quantitative estimate of their sales boost for sponsoring the team. In our post-season interview, Jordan went back to this example to make the case against a quantitative definition of success for the Momentum. Jordan laughed when she told me, "Like I said, the people who were looking for this, like [sponsor], she was focused on how many [food items] they sold. I mean, it's not about that. It's not gonna change the books. It's gonna change, you're helping us change the community. That's the bottom line. You know? You are supporting something we have never had before." As evidence that the mixing of cause and business logics varied substantially by team, one team owner also rejected the concept of ROI as a goal for WPS. When the league officially suspended its 2012 season, but had not yet folded, one soccer fan Tweeted to this owner, "Why would investors/sponsors want to commit to what's been a failure so far & is now on "hiatus"? In a rare moment of public discussion of the league on the part of ownership, the owner responded back, "Investors are not investing into an ROI with #WPS, but a shared vision."

If the cause "vision" for WPS was about opportunity and role models for girls and women, this logic was part of the founding narrative of the league itself. Similar to business logic, cause logic had emerged in tandem with the project of women's professional soccer. Amy,

a WPS manager who had worked for both WUSA and WPS, said that investors in WUSA were interested in a women's pro soccer league because of the inspiration they found in their daughters' soccer participation. Amy said, "So [WUSA owner] had assembled a few of his friends in the cable industry and I think with – I think he told me like within like 20 minutes they had raised about 42 million dollars. So that league was owned by, you know, Comcast and Time Warner, Fox Communication, Discovery – so they were all cable people who had daughters that played the game and they had a passion for it." Journalist Janine also felt that passion for women's soccer motivated investment rather than expectations of financial gain. She argued, "Well, I've heard a few of them [owners] say, "This is a five-year plan for me. I'm into the second year. I need to start making money." But honestly, I think in all reality, if you're an owner of a team – of a women's professional anything team, that you're actually in it for the passion and the heart and the game because the notion of making money, to me, is the very last thing."

Cause ideals had also sparked the creation of the Momentum. Owner Steve had three children, the two oldest in college and the youngest recently joining the military. All had played in recreational and competitive soccer leagues for years, with Steve as their coach for multiple of their soccer seasons. On many occasions, Steve spoke openly about his children's sport participation as a direct motivation for his ownership of the Momentum. As a wealthy businessman, Steve was routinely interviewed in local and city media, both as a function of his business successes and as he took on women's pro soccer. In August 2009, a local newspaper covered the Momentum owner and his motivation for signing onto WPS, reading "[Last name] took the plunge, as many team owners do, for personal reasons that can overshadow financial ones. Those reasons begin with his twin daughters. Ever since they were 4-year olds, [last name]

coached their soccer teams, witnessing firsthand how playing the sport contributed to their self-confidence and maturity." In another interview with a home and lifestyle magazine in 2011, Steve spoke again about his decision to own a women's team. The article reads, "[Steve]'s twin daughters have quite expensive tastes. Two years ago, when the pro soccer team Momentum (which operated from 2001 to 2003 as part of the Women's United Soccer Association) became available to be a part of Women's Professional Soccer (WPS), they urged [Steve] to look into it."

While business logic was rearticulated after the perceived business failures of WUSA, cause logic was a continuity from the older league, as some staff in both leagues had endorsed the idea of the league as a source of inspiration for girls and women. As organizational scholars have argued, the founding circumstances of new organizations are important. The future trajectories of organizations, their practices and structures, are in some ways path dependent, shaped by initial conceptions of what the organization is about and how it should pursue its goals. Although each WPS team negotiated competing cause and business logics in unique ways, both were part of the larger environmental influences the league faced, and both had been central to the founding of WPS.

E.   **The Gender of Cause Logic**

In contrast to business logic, which was embraced predominantly by men, cause logic was taken up more often by female staff members. As detailed above, Momentum employees Grace and Kendall were emphatic that the team was about much more than profit, and Jordan told me it was "changing the community," rather than "changing the books." Renee, a season ticket holder with two WPS teams who routinely travelled between teams for home games and also coached youth soccer, said, "And I read a guy, he was on Twitter, he's like you know what,

I have two daughters and I support them and that's why I support women's soccer. I'm like

finally somebody gets it! You know?" Renee's embrace of a cause motivation for supporting

women's pro soccer was echoed by manager Courtney. In describing her work during the 1999

Women's World Cup, Courtney made the case that the most important aspect to the tournament

was the opportunity it opened for the aspirations of young girls. Courtney told me,

> "To pioneer that [Women's World Cup] was incredible. The GM of the team always talked about that, being pioneers of the sport. It laid a lot of groundwork for giving girls the ability to dream. This now is an opportunity that was not there before. So it opens the door to say "Oh wow. I could do something more." For me, I remember having this interaction with a young girl who asked me for an autograph. And I said "Oh, I'm not a player." And she said "I know. I know you're not a player, but you work for the team, right?" I said yeah. "That's why I want your autograph." Wow. It's not just that girls can think about being athletes. They can also be women in powerful or important jobs in professional sports. Oh, wow. It's not just who's on the field. That girl looks up to me, too. It's important to our society."

Of the 54 individuals I interviewed, only one male participant made the case that

women's soccer did and should pursue non-profit related goals as central. Keith was a soccer

reporter who had begun his career covering men's soccer, but expanded to women's soccer with

WPS' kick off in 2009 when he thought "this is something that I need to cover." Keith was alone

among male participants in self-identifying as feminist, and argued forcefully for a conception of

women's soccer as a social and cultural phenomenon, as opposed to a product concerned with

profit. Keith argued,

> "I think last week I pointed out that to start a soccer league and run it takes an absurd amount of capital. The amount of money that we know has been poured into [men's] MLS on the spending side – if you will – is greater than $1 billion. And in the first five years, they went through $250 million. And this is money that we know about – through expansion fees, to what they spent at the beginning, through building stadiums. The cost of getting MLS to a point where it may be profitable – we think it is. But we're still not sure – takes an enormous amount of investment to get it to be profitable. And I feel that the same is obviously true for women's sport, perhaps even more so. Because you're dealing with a social context where women's team sports are not necessarily valued by what we would consider the mainstream media or the mainstream culture unless they're somehow associated with patriotism. So from my perspective, No. 1, you can make a lot

more money doing something else. So for me, any type of soccer – if you're a business man investing in any kind of soccer – to some extent it's a cause. You are not going for the easy buck .You are trying to do something different in the world. I would also say that women's team sports, women's soccer – again, for me, it is de facto, some kind of social issue because of No. 1, the current political environment that we live in, the political environment over the last 200-500 years in America. I think there is something that's borderline radical about it. And you can't paper it over as just a normal sporting event. Because it's not, it's just not!"

If women were more likely to embrace a notion of women's soccer as driven by goals of empowering women and girls, this emotional inspiration was deemed necessary given a larger sport environment where gender bias and discrimination remained persistent. Women involved with WPS repeatedly voiced the opinion that women were actively marginalized and disadvantaged in professional sport. However, there were varied opinions on the precise source of bias and disadvantage for female athletes. Tanya, one of the founding managers of the Momentum who left the team before 2011, felt that socialization was one root cause of disadvantage for women in sport. Tanya argued that socialization makes girls less assertive and confident in their athletic abilities, and this translates into a distinct disadvantage for women at the professional level of play. She said, "It's different on the girl's side. I feel like little boys are given a ball and they're saying go kick as hard as you can or run as fast as you can and do this, and a girl gets a soccer ball when she's six and she asks can I play?" Similarly, Momentum season ticket holder Cherish argued that the female Momentum staff members she worked with as part of the team's fan club could exert greater control over the Momentum's practices and policies if it were not for gendered socialization that pushed them toward being "nice" over being "loud." She argued, "The women could control everything, I know, if they would choose to step up and do so.[*Why do you think they don't?*] They're taught to be less, not quite that aggressive. They're taught to be a little bit more passive and yet it's still a struggle. You're taught to be nice, not to be loud, not to be pushy."

If some women argued that socialization was a source of women's disadvantage in sport, the majority of female interviewees characterized hindrance as emanating from sexist attitudes, or a sexist "mentality" that precluded women's athleticism in service of norms of traditional heterosexual femininity, and defined women as less capable athletes than men. When Momentum fan club president Anne said, "It's that whole mentality," explaining why women's sport leagues persistently struggle, I asked her, "What mentality?" Anne continued, "I think it still stems from that, that it's the holdover from – think about it. My grandmother used to not wear anything but a skirt. My mother still had to wear a skirt to school, can't wear pants to school. Those things like that, women were expected to stay home and not be the athletes. Yeah, they think they're lesser, a lot of sexism."

Loyal Momentum season ticket holders Elyse and Cristina also used the word "mentality" to explain how sexist attitudes contributed to the difficulties women's soccer faced. Elyse made the case that women's soccer was less popular than men's soccer precisely because of a sexist ideological framework. Elyse said, "If you look at women's soccer, it's even lower [than men's soccer], and it's just because of the mentality of any women's sport. It's usually that it's not worth it, it's a joke, and all these other very derogatory things, which I find ridiculous." Cristina made a similar argument that men's sport was more popular because of belief in women's physical inferiority, saying, "I think it's just because men's leagues are so popular. I think it's just that mentality that guys play so much better, and make it more interesting than women do. The same way I get when I start playing with guys. They don't pass me the ball because they don't think I can play or keep up. So they probably don't think that women can keep up   with   guys   or   can   play   to   that   extent,   I   guess."

In addition to arguing for the existence of persistent belief in female inferiority in sport, other interviewees documented practices where this idea was directly put into action. Multiple interview participants argued that rejection by mainstream media outlets constituted evidence of sexism in sport. For instance, Alicia told a story about contacting ESPN to encourage them to increase their coverage of WPS. In an angry tone, Alicia reported,

"They [media] just assume that people don't want to hear about soccer or just women's sports in general. It's annoying because there is a big market out there. There are a lot of people that really do enjoy women's soccer, and I just feel like a lot of companies and a lot of media just won't bother because they just – it's a very sexist view. It's just people don't really care about women's sports so we're not gonna cover it, and no, we're not gonna do this and that. They, ESPN, a couple other fans and I got to e-mail ESPN every day, and they just would not respond. All they did was they had their automatic response and they didn't cover the games. It's just I feel like when it comes to a lot of marketing, television, stuff like that, I feel like they just write women's sports off because they automatically assume that people don't care. They're wrong. There's still a lot of sexism surrounding women's sports, and it's kind of unfortunate because it's probably the one thing holding the sport back."

In addition to the practices of media, other women drew attention to the money paid professional female athletes as an example of a practice contributing to inequality. Anne said that, "Women's sports do not get the press that men's sports do. They just don't. They don't pay them the same amount of money." Erin also took up the issue of pay, making the case that women's lower pay compared to men was evidence of persistent sexist attitudes in sport. Erin argued, "It [women's sport] just isn't valued the way men's sports are. I mean, the root of it is probably sexism. And women aren't seen as an athletic draw. You look at how much male athletes are paid compared to female athletes. I don't know. People aren't as accepting of women being athletic." One male participant also felt that pay gaps between male and female professional soccer players reflected investor perceptions of female inferiority. Jerry, a WPS trainer and strength coach, argued that

"They have to change the perception of the female athlete. You know, it can work. And I've seen it in other countries. I've seen it can work, but for whatever reason in America -- because I work with a lot of pro female athletes and Olympic athletes -- it seems like in America they just don't want to pay the women the same amount as the men. I'm not really sure why, but it seems like if you can pay Beckham $30 million and you can't give Abby Wambach X amount? It's like who are the big investors? Who are the big-time investors? Who are the owners? Like the market will change when the owners that own these teams look at it a lot different."

If most women, as well as a few men, were likely to perceive sport to be riddled with continuing sexist practices, some of this perception stemmed from personal experience among female WPS staff. Personal experiences with sexism and marginalization in the larger field of professional sport echo research in sport administration and governance that finds persistent gender bias in sport organizations. Jordan expressed a perception that masculinity was more highly valued in sport than femininity. Prior to working at the Momentum, Jordan had been a paid intern for a men's professional soccer team. In our interview, Jordan said that characteristics associated with traditional masculinity, such as toughness, verbal aggression, and zero tolerance for error had been highly valued within this team, and that she had struggled to embody these on a daily basis. Jordan said about her time with men's soccer, "Working for [team] was the best experience I could have ever asked for. They put on six layers of thick skin. If I wasn't crying twice a week for making mistakes, I wasn't working hard enough. You know?"

Jordan's perception of the value placed on masculinity within sport did not shift when she came to the Momentum. Early in the morning one May week day, Jordan came in to the office far more dressed up than usual, in a grey pencil skirt and pink ruffled top, with heavy makeup. She had been at a local panel discussion and networking session held by a regional sport business organization. She gushed about the panel to Grace, saying that it was "Ah-*may*-zing" and that Grace should consider going in the future. Detailing the session, Jordan said that there was one woman speaking, a leader of some sort in the sports world, who Jordan particularly admired.

"She was wearing a bright pink suit," Jordan said, "She was not afraid to be feminine in this male-dominated industry." She added, after a pause, "I certainly am."

While Jordan experienced the devaluing of femininity within sport, Grace experienced persistent marginalization vis-à-vis media. On her desk next to her computer was a handwritten list of both local and national media sources to approach about covering the Momentum during the 2011 season. Despite efforts over phone and email, she had minimal success in gaining coverage for the team, and in several cases was not allowed to make her pitch when she called a potential outlet. Although Grace rarely spoke openly about these struggles, at times her frustration in being rejected by media boiled over. For instance, during a mid-season weekday in June, Momentum media intern Carolyn announced to the room that there had been a Facebook comment by a fan decrying the lack of ESPN coverage given to WPS. Interested, Grace went to Facebook on her computer, read the comment aloud, and then declared loudly, "*Ay*-men!" "Oh my God, seriously," seconded Carolyn.

The conception of the sport environment as characterized by persistently gendered attitudes and expectations explains the low returns on investment within women's soccer entirely differently than business logic. Rather than a function of women's inferior play, lower visibility, interest, and buy in reflects discriminatory practices that emerge from the a priori assumption that female athletes lack value. Ideas about women's inferiority, rather than true inferiority itself, produce the conditions of women's soccer's comparative marginalization. Courtney told a story of being ignored by the local newspaper that illustrates the cause explanation of women's sporting struggle. It was the rejection by the newspaper, which Courtney perceived to emerge out of sexist beliefs in female inferiority in sport, that contributed in part to lower attendance and sponsor figures for the WPS championship game. Courtney explained,

"I get a paper on my doorstep every Thursday for free, the local times for my area. They never would run stories on us. Sure, they had a sports section. I called. I had my PR person do it first. No response. Then I did it. I actually live here, I'm a general manager of a pro sports team, and I expect you to cover us. Well you're not close enough to our area. Well, you cover the Raiders and they're not there, either. It would be great if you could cover women's sports. Listen, we'll make it easy for you. We'll write the articles. You don't even need to send out a reporter. We just need you to publish them. And then my neighbor was like Oh, so this is what you do! I just saw you in the paper! It just kills me. The freebie doesn't even think we're worth coverage."

Paradoxically, belief in the persistence of gender bias and discrimination in sport

coexisted with a rejection of feminism. There was substantial uncertainty amongst the staff, fans,

players and media personnel I spoke to around whether WPS embraced explicitly feminist goals,

with the majority opining that while the league could be about "empowerment," this was not a

feminist concept and the league not a feminist organization. Even among those who

acknowledged the influence of feminism on the sport, the public labeling of WPS as feminist

was deemed a risky proposition in its likelihood of alienating investors. Reported Jessie said that

WPS engaged in practices that were feminist in an "implicit" way, but did not acknowledge

feminism or feminist influences directly. When I asked her why, Jessie said, "I think they still

have this idea that it is really radical. Like it's too radical. There's still this idea that feminism

doesn't really mesh with, identify more mainstream kind of perception I guess. That's the reason

why the league hasn't exactly been so – it hasn't been so excited about that kind of rumble."

Paid intern Dillon felt that the label of feminism was "too strong" for the league and had

negative connotations. He argued,

"I think the word feminist is used a lot. But I mean I definitely think it's – it's promoting a positive female image. And I don't know if I would classify that as feminist. Because I feel like when you say feminist it definitely has a negative connotation to it, so people would think of, you know it's anti-male or pro-lesbian or something like that. But I feel like it gives it a great strong image for girls out there to look up to. Like gives them athletic role models. So, I think maybe attaching feminist, it might be too soon to do that or it might be too strong a word. I know like now they try to look for like a gendered philosophy, but I think keeping – WPS is known to be – I mean it's *Women's* Pro Soccer,

so I don't think that it's vague as to what sex is playing. I don't think it's necessary to actually attach feminism to it."

Similarly, WPS marketing manager Joshua argued that while role modeling for girls was an important function of women's soccer teams, to call this "feminist" would be to employ feminism as a "crutch" that denied the business realities of the organization. Joshua argued,

> "I think it might be easy to use that [feminism] as a crutch, to go that route. They are the best players in the world, and they deserve a place to play. I think probably sometimes people use it as a cop out. It's a business, and if money is lost, owners aren't happy about it. There are players in the league that would say they are role models, and players who would shy away from it. I would think the cause would be to have athletes, young girls, that would be the cause, for them to have something to look up to."

Christine, a manager for both WUSA and WPS teams, was more likely than either Dillon or Joshua to label aspects of WPS' operation as feminist. However, she still felt unsure about the applicability of feminism to women's soccer. When I asked Christine if she considered WPS to be a feminist organization, she said,

> "Feminist organization. You know, I've never thought of it that way. I just haven't! I think that if somebody's definition of being a feminist is to demonstrate strength in women, and showing the importance of the role of women in society, then yeah, I'd say it's a feminist organization. Or there's some feminist prevailing in there. There are definitely a lot of women who would say they were feminists in the organization, who are supporters. Ticket holders. So maybe you can't separate it."

Janine also felt wary of the feminist label for WPS, and preferred a different framing for the sport. When I asked Janine whether WPS could be considered a feminist organization, she argued,

> "I think it's difficult, you know? I think doing something like that [using the term feminist] would be – I mean, at least, as far as I know, a little bit out of the ordinary. I don't know for sure that any other professional sports have done that. I'm not sure that that would be helpful to do something like that. I think, sometimes, you have to – in order to overcome things, that the best thing you can do is simplify it. And the simple truth is, is that we're women. We're good at what we do, and we're ready to go out there and represent our country. So why shouldn't you support us?"

To summarize this chapter, ethnographic data from WPS and the Momentum document conflicting field-level macro logics that spell out divergent visions of success for the team and the league. Business logic suggests that all potential practices should be evaluated for their contribution to the bottom line. In contrast, cause logic holds that generating empowerment among girls and women should be preferred over profit. Both business and cause logics derive from local and extra-local institutional sources, including local and national corporations, media, sport business programs, regional and national men's teams, and youth sport. While cause logic does derive in part from the liberal feminist movement in sport, the goals of this movement have been taken up, yet divorced from the language of feminism among WPS staff as part of ongoing backlash against feminism and fear of alienating potential investors.

In addition to delineating these logics, I show how logics are gendered in their assumptions and in how they are taken up by stakeholders with varying social locations. First, business and cause logics present not only conflicting goals for women's soccer, but a clash of assumptions around the larger environment for female athletes. While business logic holds that equality has been achieved for women in sport, cause logic points to ongoing bias and marginalization. Further, the social location of stakeholders is key to understanding how logics are taken up and employed, with women more likely than men to embrace a cause orientation to the sport.

That business and cause logics are perceived to be at odds with one another suggests the contradictory nature of the contemporary environment for women's soccer, and perhaps for women's sport writ large. In a 1988 article, Michael Messner claimed the female athlete as contested ideological terrain given the centrality of organized sport to hegemonic masculinities. To date, this contestation has been studied largely as a discursive manoevering within media or

sport contexts such as youth sport, men's sport organizations, sport governance bodies, and schools. In an important departure from this work, I show that the female athlete is not only contested ideologically, but is also contested organizational terrain. Power struggles over the meanings attached to female athletes are taken up within organizational structures, and are embedded within organizational practices. The struggles to navigate competing business and cause logics within WPS had important effects on the actual daily practice of selling women's sport, a theme that I delineate further in the following chapter

X. "THEN THE BUSINESS STARTS TO KICK IN": LOGICS IN PRACTICE

A.   **<u>Introduction</u>**

Derrick was a national sports reporter in his 30s well known to the women's soccer

community. While he had covered sports, including soccer, for mainstream media organizations

for several years, he had also started a website for reporting on the women's game that had

quickly become a top go-to site for news and updates about the league. I admired Derrick for his

work to bring media attention to women's soccer and had great respect for his knowledge and

opinion. When I interviewed Derrick partway through the 2011 season, I asked him what he

thought about the perennial debate around whether WPS constituted a business or a cause. After

thinking a moment, he responded,

> "I mean I think it's a mix. I know I like to walk the line on a lot of things, but I do think
> that it's sort of a middle ground. Because all the owners will tell you at the end of the
> day they're businessmen, and that's clear because, you know, they're not gonna keep
> losing money or be involved in bad business. But, I mean businessmen are not – there's
> no way that, in my mind that they get involved without some type of a cause in their
> minds and something, you know, that they believe in. But I guess as fans they believe in
> it, as businessmen they're a little more realistic, but still optimistic. So I think it's both. I
> think that without the cause you don't even probably get the startup of it. And *then the
> business starts to kick in* (emphasis added)."

Derrick's comment is a clear illustration of the way that dual business and cause logics

were worked out in practice prior to and during the Momentum's 2011 season and into the

offseason. While both logics derived from WPS' institutional environment and were part of the

founding narrative of the league itself, business truly began to "kick in" after the Momentum's

first full season in 2010. From 2010-2012, the Momentum increasingly organized practices

according to business logic. That is, the daily work of the team shifted to focus increasing

attention on practices believed to generate profit and/or minimize expenditure. While the

Momentum focused substantial attention on ticketing initiatives and community events early on

in the 2011 season, believing that the inspiration of girls and women took place largely through the public appearances of players, the project of building community visibility gradually lost in importance compared to efforts at corporate partnerships.

The "kicking in" of business logic within the team from 2010-2012 was almost entirely due to decision making on the part of Steve, the team's owner. Steve's transition from owner to dual owner-General Manager in 2011 increased his influence over the team's goals and daily practices. Steve's commitment to the pursuit of profit emerged from his background as a businessman and entrepreneur. Although Steve initially invested in the team due to cause motivations, as his twin daughters' soccer careers had inspired him, over time his leadership revolved less around inspiring girls and women through the organization and more on minimizing the cost of running the team. Steve was committed to business logic even when the consequence was tense relations between staff and high employee turnover, as several staff members left the team before the league suspended play. Relations of power and hierarchy internal to the team, then, are central to understanding the increased focus on profit within the team. The business "kicked in" at the Momentum more so than at other teams because of the enormous decision making power that Steve possessed. If organizations are pervaded by power relations, "some actors occupy 'more advantaged positions than others'. Since fields are established through processes…that suit the most powerful actors, the values and beliefs of these actors come to be reflected in the dominant logic" (Reay and Hinings 2009, p. 631).

This shift also took place in response to several perceived moments of failure. Importantly, lower than expected attendance at home games became evidence of "failure" once attendance was covered by mainstream or online media outlets, evidence of the importance of media in influencing the Momentum's work. Once game attendance figures became public and

visible, these numbers needed to be directly addressed and responded to. It was in context of dealing with public perceptions of the team and league that the leaders of the Momentum (Steve and CFO Rich) reassessed the work of the office staff and purposely intervened to shift practice toward greater adherence with business logic. While cause-related practices became less important over time, there remained minimal cause mandates that needed to be met. Cause goals were not dropped entirely, but became secondary and less highly valued.

The shift I observed in daily practice over time, from business and cause logic to business logic alone, had significant implications for gender inside the office, and for the experiences of women working for the Momentum. I document a discourse of paternalism that structured relationships between female staff and the male leaders of the team. Steve and Rich, as the most powerful players at the Momentum, routinely treated women in the office as if they were incompetent and in need of help. Women's work, including my own, was heavily monitored and scrutinized.

Paradoxically, as cause practices previously endorsed by leadership came to be defined as failing over time given persistently low attendance numbers and when compared to pursuing sponsors, those female staff members most committed to the cause approach gained greater leeway to shape cause practices according to their own interests without significant oversight. The changing logic balance at the Momentum saw fewer resources accorded to cause related practices, but gave more autonomy to women to craft those practices. The shift in logic adoption that was driven by the team's owner was not accepted passively by staff, but was resisted energetically.

B.   **Defining 2010**

My research before entering the field, as well as interviews and informal conversations with Momentum staff in 2011, made it clear that team owner Steve had significantly downsized the office staff after 2010, mirroring a league downsizing including the national marketing department being eliminated. After the Momentum's General Manager left at the conclusion of 2010, Steve stepped in to fill this role, rather than hiring or promoting someone new. He also reduced the size of the ticket sales department, eliminating several paid positions. Ticket manager Chris felt that this downsizing had made his job more difficult. He said, "It's crazy. This is like yeah, we're going to do this [downsize], and we'll regroup. We'll have the same budget. Then it's like no, we're going to scrap these four positions. They were making $1,000 a month."

As I came to the team during the pre-season months in 2011, Steve was also implementing what he called the "Momentum-style business model" as it applied to signing players. Steve's strategy for filling the roster for 2011 was very different from 2010. Evidence of an increased importance placed on financial considerations within the team was seen in the kind of players signed. While the 2010 Momentum had signed several high-profile players, including one star of the U.S. Women's National Team, the new business model involved sacrificing well-known, big name players in favor of no-name younger players paid substantially less. A 2011 preview of WPS teams on Derrick's website noted that Momentum coach Larry has "the league's least recognized roster." This was an explicit tradeoff between competitiveness on the field and the possibility of profit for the team, or at least of reducing financial loss. This strategy operated in direct contrast to player signings at several other WPS teams, whose owners chose to pay high salaries in order to attract top playing talent. In one, admittedly rare, instance, a Women's National Team player was paid $100,000 to trade teams partway through the season.

Steve did not look favorably on other teams' high salary budgets, believing this to be an unsustainable practice for the league in the long run. In September, after the season had ended, Steve brought the staff in to his office for an impromptu meeting. He said that he had successfully convinced the league to run a "Momentum-style business model" for the following season. "We can't have teams stacking themselves with the top players by paying the big dollars," Steve told us. He argued instead for a model that would equalize team outcomes and halt financial losses for the teams.

These changes to the team were Steve's response to the well-documented and highly publicized failures of the 2010 season. The first year of the Momentum's play in WPS had seen the team finish in last place, failing to make the playoffs. Failure also extended beyond the field and included low attendance figures, particularly painful to Steve given the team's historic stadium space. In addition, Steve was direct with his assessment that he had lost too much money in 2010. Reflecting on the changes he had seen at the Momentum from 2010 to 2011, intern Dillon explained that these changes had been implemented with an eye toward profit. Dillon said, "I feel like this year we were able to show, even though we were still operating at a loss, we were cutting that loss back from what it was that first year. So we're – our margins are increasing, like our marginal cost and our marginal revenue, although still negative, are slowly decreasing and becoming, you know closer to zero so we can make money in a couple of years."

C.   **Logic Balance**

Despite the downsizing of paid staff and new approach to signing players, the daily practice of selling women's soccer was driven by both the prospect of profit and the potential for inspiring girls and women. That is, upon joining the team in the preseason months of 2011, I perceived a relative balance between business and cause logics. While Steve had shifted several

practices with the goal of minimizing expenditures in 2011, he simultaneously committed to reaching out to girls and women in the local metropolitan community. Steve was on board with cause-related practices because he believed that girls, and the families they came from, comprised the major "market" driving ticket sales and game attendance. As ticket manager Chris acknowledged in our interview, "I think the league as a whole said the market is U8 [Under 8] to U12 [Under 12] girls and their parents." In contrast to several of the female staff members I worked closely with, who (as seen earlier) asserted a distinction between empowering girls and making money, Steve viewed marketing to girls and women as valuable in its potential to increase ticket sales. The Momentum's 2010 Manager of Corporate Partnerships had quit months before I joined the team. Steve had hired Jordan to replace her, but changed the position's formal title to Manager of Corporate Partnerships and Community Programs. Steve used the former manager's leaving as an opportunity to strengthen the team's efforts at community appearances and charity work. These appearances, all of which included organizations and charities for girls and women or community events perceived to be "family friendly," were deemed the primary practice to appeal to girls and their parents. In an early conversation in his office, I asked Steve broadly about his approach to selling the team. Sitting in the black leather chair at his desk, Steve reiterated a belief that the cause "angle" would be important for company buy-in and investment in the team. He said, "You still have to go after companies with the women's sports angle, with the cause angle. Go after the emotions!"

Early in the season when cause initiatives were valued by Steve, if only for their direct contribution to the bottom line, women who believed in and did the work of cause-related practices needed to justify these in front of team leadership as a collaboration under the rubric of business logic.

Those occasions when an empowerment initiative did result in clear, measureable gain for the team was a high point of excitement for women in the office. These were moments when their work could be valued according to the standards of dominant business logic, a value that could be clearly communicated to Steve. The usual protocol during staff meetings was that each paid staff member would speak in turn, and then the floor would be open for interns to contribute, if they had something to report. During one staff meeting, Grace was noticeably excited as she waited her turn to speak. When the floor was given to her, she explained eagerly that a national television station was coming to the upcoming home game to film a promo spot. The station had been interested in the team's Mom of the Match initiative, designed to celebrate a local mother, and they wanted to interview the game's Mom of the Match about why soccer and the Momentum were important to her and her kids for a commercial. This media coverage was a major coup for the team, and both Jordan and Grace were beaming while their success was communicated to Steve. Grace continued that the Mom had agreed to be interviewed, and noted, almost as if she did not believe it, that "We have this in writing."

D. **2011 Season Failures**

At 5:30 pm, it was a warm 70 degrees as I pulled into the massive parking lot of the local suburban high school. There were already hundreds of people milling around, the crowd dominated by young children and high school-aged youth. A large electronic billboard at the entrance to the lot announced the name of the high school, as well as the event name and date. I was there to help Jordan staff the Momentum tent at a local walking relay to raise money for breast cancer research.

The event was set up along a long concrete walkway at least a quarter mile long, if not closer to half a mile. The end of the walkway was demarcated by a tall white building with a

stage set up in front. A sound system stood next to the stage, and sets of microphones and stands lined the perimeter. Small white tents were lined up side by side all along the concrete, squeezed in next to one another. There were tents for restaurants, clubs, organizations, community groups, businesses – insurance agencies, Chik-Fil-A, Boy Scouts, youth sports teams. Many tents had food set up and were selling funnel cakes, snow cones, egg rolls, drinks, and chicken sandwiches to attendees. Several colorful inflatable bouncy things for kids waved in the evening breeze. Pink was the clothing theme for the event, with many people wearing pink tshirts for cancer-related charities. One man wore a light pink shirt that read 'Real men wear pink' in white lettering. Several elderly adults zipped by on motorized chairs.

When I arrived at the Momentum tent, I saw that 10 players were present, all in various combinations of Momentum apparel. Jordan handed them each a thick stack of tickets to the upcoming home game and instructed the players to walk up and down the walkway, interacting with people and handing out free tickets. She called the players around her into a huddle, almost as if before a game, and instructed them to "Go for the kids" in handing out tickets. The players nodded and split into smaller groups of two or three to walk around the event. Some were clearly more excited about their task than others.

As I had already proven to be outgoing and not afraid of strangers, Jordan had me stand a few feet in front of the tent during the evening's relay, greeting people as they walked by and directing them to the free tickets and raffle prizes that were available under the Momentum's tent. I was loud and persuasive, and kept a steady stream of visitors to the tent. One middle-aged blonde woman ran up to me from halfway down the walkway and hugged me eagerly. She spent a half hour at the tent, looking at all of the merchandise and talking to Jordan and I about her love of the team. This woman was a 2010 and 2011 season ticket holder, knew all of the players

by name, and said that she was looking forward to the upcoming home game. When she reluctantly left the tent, pulled away by family members, Jordan was beaming. "You know," she said to me, "These are the fans that make it all worthwhile."

At the conclusion of the event, Jordan calculated that we had given away between 600 and 700 tickets. As I helped carry boxes of merchandise to her car, Jordan told me that the team didn't usually give that many tickets away. This initiative was brainstormed by Steve in response to the lower than expected attendance numbers at the first two home games. The goal was to "pack the stands" for this upcoming game, which would be televised, thus crafting a public perception of high levels of attendance and interest in the team. "It's like an experiment," Jordan said. She laughed, "If we give the stadium away, will people come?"

Jordan's concluding remark on the ticket giveaway was an indirect reference to a famous line in the 1989 movie "Field of Dreams." In the movie, a rural farmer, played by actor Kevin Costner, is instructed by spirits to build a baseball diamond amidst his cornfields. The line "If you build it, he will come," is what Jordan made reference to. The comment expressed the simultaneous hope and confusion present among Momentum staff around the time of the breast cancer relay event and the ticket giveaway.

This moment took place near the beginning of the 2011 season, but after two home games had been disastrous both on the field in terms of play and off the field in attendance and ticket sales. News articles covering these games had sparked debate on the significance of the Momentum's recent failures for the league, and Steve had called a special staff meeting specifically to address the issue of low attendance. Up until this point, Jordan's work had been about equally split between putting together pitches for corporate sponsors and organizing community events. In addition to the charity relay, I had attended another breast cancer-themed

road race, a local food fair, and an event with a local girls nonprofit promoting bone health and physical activity, as well as several playing clinics put on for girls. Despite an active schedule of public appearances in the suburban community where the team was located, attendance at games had been low enough to attract media commentary.

The special staff meeting in early June 2011 was a moment of transition. Steve was acutely aware of public debate on low attendance in the league, with several articles hinting that WPS may face the same ending as WUSA. Whereas for Jordan, community appearances were "worthwhile" because of positive and meaningful interactions with fans, the metric of success for Steve was game attendance. He only once attended a public event himself, and even then, only briefly to check in. At this staff meeting, Steve asked whether or not the cause-related practice of doing community events was worthwhile given the greater goal of a financially profitable team. Larry, the team's head coach, argued that the Momentum should try ramping up its ties to local youth leagues, feeling that the team needed to do more outreach to girls and their parents. In response, Chris told a long, impassioned story of being shut out by coaches and board members of youth soccer organizations. He said that many of them refused to allow the Momentum to hand out fliers or schedules or have the players do signings. "Basically," Chris concluded, "They think they're better than us." This line of reasoning baffled everyone in the room, as evidenced by multiple shared looks of confusion. From his seat at the head of the long table, Steve shook his head sadly. Coach Larry was up in arms. Jumping out of his chair, he yelled to the room, "What? That doesn't make any sense. These are natural partners!" No one had a response for him.

This meeting was dominated by confusion over the supposed inability of the team to reach their target demographic (girls) through community events. This meeting was the first

moment where cause-related practices were called into question by Steve, and marked the beginning of a transition to the dominance of the business approach. After this meeting, Steve devised the ticket giveaway as a method of generating positive press for the team. "Packing the stands" and giving the impression of a paid, sold out crowd to the television audience for the upcoming game would relieve some of the pressure Steve felt around negative media coverage. In the next week, all staff and interns were tasked with giving away tickets to local businesses and groups. All tickets given out were accounted for on a floor-to-ceiling white board in Chris' office; the total count was over 15,000. Actual game attendance was over 6,000, then-record attendance for the league. Despite the fact that this was not a paid audience, the size of the crowd was celebrated by Steve and the staff for contributing to the legitimacy of the team in the eyes of the public. The "giveaway game" was a one-time event, but served to undermine the cause approach. If cause-related practices, such as appearing at community and charity events, "worked" in the sense of boosting attendance, the giveaway game should not have been necessary.

After this game, relationships between staff in the office became more contentious as debate raged over the relative merits of business and cause related approaches for the team. For instance, I witnessed a disagreement between Jordan and Office Manager Sandra that took place the week after the giveaway game. During all home games, Sandra was in charge of selling Momentum-branded merchandise at the small storefront at the stadium. On this workday, Sandra entered the office room I shared with Jordan and Grace to discuss a small number of Momentum scarves she had found in a box left over from the previous season. These could not be sold at the store during games because they were not made by the league's 2011 apparel sponsor, but Sandra did not want them to "go to waste." Considering the situation, Jordan felt that the scarves

should be given away to fans to build morale and positive energy on game days. Jordan continued, telling everyone in the room that they could either raffle the scarves based on ticket numbers or throw the scarves out to fans from the sidelines. After considering this option, Sandra responded that she had been thinking "more along the lines of finding a way to sell them to increase revenue." Jordan responded that it was too risky to sell the scarves because "if [sponsor] found out, the team would be in trouble." She continued, after a pause, that "Besides, isn't enhancing the fan experience as important as revenue?" Sandra nodded and smiled throughout this conversation, but was clearly not getting the support for her position that she desired. She concluded noncommittally that she would ask Steve's opinion and left the room. Later in the season, I noticed that the scarves were being sold in the Momentum store during games. Either the team had received permission from their current apparel sponsor or was selling these scarves without their knowledge.

A similar debate took place two weeks later the day of the next home game. This time, however, the conversation became significantly more contentious and I was more directly involved. The game was to kick off at 7 pm. By 8 am, while I was just getting out of bed, Jordan had texted me to ask for help. When I called her, Jordan asked me if I would spend the afternoon in Chris' room in the Momentum office answering the phone. Fans who called looking to buy tickets on game day called that office, but Chris would be at the stadium all day setting up for the game. While fans could wait to buy tickets when they arrived at the stadium, Jordan wanted a more "personal touch." She told me that families with children never knew whether they would attend until the day of the game but wanted to guarantee their tickets over the phone, and I would be giving "good customer service" by speaking directly to parents.

By 10 am, I arrived at the Momentum office, my laptop and a bag of snacks in hand. I wore my Momentum staff shirt and had done my hair for the game, not sure how long I would be at the office. After seeing me set up at Chris' desk next to the phone, Jordan took off for the stadium. I was alone in the mostly darkened office space. I spent several hours moving between my own work on my laptop and Chris' desktop computer, booking tickets to the evening's game for fans who called. Around 1 pm, Chris rushed into his office, sweating from spending the morning outside. I could tell by the look on his face that he was not happy to find me at his desk. Chris asked me what I was doing there, and I explained Jordan's request. Chris shook his head in annoyance and picked my laptop up off his desk to physically move me into Jordan's office space across the hall. He told me that he did not agree with Jordan that someone should be answering the phone on game days. Fans needed to learn that they couldn't treat the Momentum like a lesser sports team by not planning ahead. Fans were either going to come or not come, and no amount of "customer service" would change that! He added, almost as an afterthought, "Besides, my office voicemail goes directly to my cell." Chris spent about ten minutes in his office after I moved, but I could not see what he was doing. The physical distance between us and the silence of the dark office reflected tension between us. In Jordan's office at my usual cubicle, I wrote a few hasty thoughts about this unfolding incident into a Word document, including my opinion that, "I feel like my status as a lowly intern saved me from a more serious scolding." After Chris swept out of the office without saying anything to me, I told Jordan via text message that Chris had asked me to stop answering the phone and didn't seem very happy I was in his office. Jordan texted back that Chris would just have to "get over it." She said she knew that he got messages on his cell phone, but that he never returned any of those calls. The fans who called with questions or to buy tickets on game day deserved to speak to someone

personally. Jordan directed me to resume my position at the phone, a demand that I obeyed, though with some degree of apprehension.

At 4:30, Chris called the number I was answering and asked me again to stop answering the phone. I did not know how he had found me out. Since I didn't want to cause additional tension, I agreed and left the Momentum office. I swung by the local Starbucks for a cup of coffee and then headed to the stadium, my stacks of paper surveys and bag of ink pens in the back of my car. Walking onto the broad concrete main concourse of the stadium, I spotted Jordan, who told me there would be a staff meeting shortly in one of the suites that ringed one side of the concourse. At this meeting, Rich grabbed the floor quickly to announce in front of all staff and volunteers that he was aware of recent breakdowns in "communication" and "cooperation." Without looking at or addressing any one person in particular, he continued, "I want to remind you that we are all on the same team here, working for the same goals." It was clear to me that Rich was aware of the day's tension between Jordan and Chris, and I felt awkward and caught in the middle. Intern Dillon was responsible for writing up notes on each staff meeting and emailing them to the entire staff. Dillon's write-ups commonly listed the first name of everyone who spoke, followed by a brief recap of what was discussed. Whether after direction from Steve or on his own, Dillon's write up of this meeting listed Rich's name, followed by "private info."

While Rich attempted to get Jordan and Chris on the same page by reminding them that they had the same goals, what was happening over time was, in fact, a splitting of the staff along the lines of different goals and different metrics of success. Shortly after this, the fourth home game of the season, in June 2011, Steve brought European soccer manager Sasha in to the team as a pro-bono consultant. A business logic focus on profit and measurable gain, particularly

through corporate partnerships, was ramped up by Sasha when he joined mid-season. To Sasha, the work of the Momentum needed to be focused on profit above other initiatives, and profit was most clearly guaranteed through deals with corporations. Sasha met with Jordan for two hours in the week after his introduction to the team, and Jordan's work shifted toward corporate pitches and away from community events soon after this. In the post-season, Jordan asked me to put together a list of all of the community events the team had done since the previous March. In doing so, I realized that after June 10, 2011, the team had ceased all community and charity events, only doing public appearances of a sort in the form of playing clinics for girls. The season, which had begun in April, extended through August 2011. While Jordan's formal job title held her responsible for both corporate partnerships and community events, the latter stopped happening after Sasha came to the Momentum. This shift occurred concomitant to my taking over newsletter production entirely, as opposed to working in corporate sponsorship.

Sasha was very clear in his opinion that community events, especially those geared towards girls and their families, were completely useless. For instance, one weekday shortly after Sasha joined the team, he announced to the office at large that he was leaving for a few hours, but would return. At this announcement, Jordan reminded him that there was a scheduled phone call with the German Embassy. The goal of the call was to suggest collaboration between the embassy, the Momentum, and a local soccer charity for girls, a project Jordan had brainstormed and was passionate about. "You can't leave now!" Jordan said. At this, Sasha paused a minute. "I don't know how we can get business out of this," he said, and then left the office, leaving Jordan to field the phone call by herself. In another staff meeting, Jordan announced that she had been in contact with a local women's health charity about taking part in their upcoming 10k road race. Alternatively, the team could participate in a car wash for a local radio station, held on the same

day. Steve, sitting as always at the head of the table, did not speak, but turned his head toward Sasha. Sasha said that a promotion with a radio station would be better than doing the race. On a third occasion, Sasha and Jordan had a meeting with a regional youth soccer association leader. Coming out of the glass conference room, Sasha loudly proclaimed the meeting "a waste of time." Jordan did not respond; I could tell she pretended not to hear him. "Didn't you think so?" Sasha asked Jordan. Jordan shrugged.

By the time of a post-season September staff meeting, Steve was convinced that cause practices did not contribute to the bottom line in women's soccer. In this meeting, Steve was particularly blunt about his feelings on the season. He spoke at length about his frustration around the struggles the team had faced in selling themselves to external individuals and organizations. Steve admitted that he had once thought a cause framework might bring in investors to the team. Specifically, he had thought that a cause framing would appeal to women. He said, "You'd think going to women CEOs, women business leaders, the story would be different, that the league would have better success. But they are just like a man!" In this moment, Steve acknowledged a focus on women, but argued that his failure to bring women on board signified the failure of the cause framework to bring measurable gain to the team.

At the conclusion of the 2011 season, I interviewed Vincent, the general manager of a Midwest WPS team. Vincent had heard that the famous 2011 Momentum attendance record had been a sham, and that the tickets had been given away and had not been sold. I confirmed this fact for him, and explained, perhaps a little defensively, that the Momentum had been worried about their public image given lower than expected attendance numbers. Vincent responded that while he would not have decided on a giveaway game as the answer, he had spoken to Steve multiple times throughout the season and was aware of his frustration over attendance. Vincent,

like Steve, agreed that marketing efforts in local and regional communities were not "worth it" financially. Vincent explained,

> "The analogy that I've used is there is oil in – there's probably oil in Virginia. I don't think of Virginia as an oil country the way Texas is, or Alaska. There's oil under the ground in Virginia, but is it worth it to bring in a team to drill wells and extract that amount of oil? How much money are they gonna have to spend in order to get that oil out of the ground, and that's really like, I think the best analogy for the women's soccer audience in America right now. It's there, but how you get it and how much money do you have to spend to get it?"

Although Sasha returned to Europe after the WPS season ended in August, Steve continued to focus resources primarily on corporate partner efforts after his friend's departure. In the post-season, Jordan and Steve embarked on what Jordan told me was a "whirlwind tour" of meetings with corporate leaders to pitch sponsor options with the Momentum. On the several occasions where these meetings successfully led to sponsor deals, staff meetings took on a celebratory mood, with talk of the new sponsor overshadowing all other topics. For example, at one staff meeting in September, Steve opened the meeting as he usually did, by identifying one staff member sitting around the table to begin their report on recent work. On that day, he identified Jordan as first to speak. When Jordan opened her mouth to begin, however, Steve jumped in to interrupt her, unable to contain his excitement. He announced that the two of them had a very successful week or two with sponsor renewal. "So great!" he said very loudly. To polite laughter, he stood in his seat and jokingly put his hands around Jordan's throat to simulate choking her in his exuberance.

The only times that Steve ever treated the staff to lunch or brought snacks into the office were in celebration of successful sponsor pitches. On one, admittedly rare, afternoon, Steve's wife sent home baked cookies to the staff via Sandra after a positive corporate meeting. Grace,

Kendall and I began to joke with Jordan that she had better work hard on her PowerPoint presentations for companies so that we could all enjoy free food!

E.   **Gendered Staff Relationships: Paternalism and Oversight**

Male team leadership enacted paternalism towards women workers in office interaction. Similarly, Theberge (2000) found in a study of a Canadian women's elite ice hockey team that the male owner and team coach exerted strong control over female players' daily lives. Owner Steve and his close friend Rich treated women as though they were in need of oversight. I noticed right away in joining the team that women's work was always submitted to either Steve or Rich for approval, while male employees like Chris were only ever asked to report their work after the fact in formal staff meetings. I was assigned to Jordan's supervision in part because my fan survey data was deemed important to her work. Jordan and I went back and forth for an entire work day, drafting and revising the survey I would administer. Once Jordan and I had agreed on a final version, she cautioned me to wait to print until the survey had been seen and approved by Rich. The same was true for the newsletter – each weekly issue was sent to Rich for approval before it could be emailed to fans.

The Momentum had a company car, a Jeep, that was painted in a bright green turf print with the words "We Are the Momentum!" in large red letters. This highly visible symbol of the team was placed at the entrance to the stadium before home games and was driven back to the office afterwards. Women were never allowed to drive the Momentum Jeep. For each home game, Steve asked either Rich or Chris to drive the Jeep into the stadium. However, the confusion of the post-game crowd one May evening resulted in Jordan's driving the Jeep from the stadium to the nearby restaurant where the team held their post-game dinners and fan meet and greets. At each of these post-game events, the staff divided themselves by table according to

the social hierarchy of the office. Steve, Rich, Chris, and head coach Larry sat around one circular wooden table, while I sat at another with Jordan and ticket manager Kendall. While the three of us were quietly drinking our respective beers, Rich left his table to come up beside Jordan. "I heard you drove the Jeep," he said. Jordan nodded, "Yeah." "Keys," Rich demanded, holding one hand out expectantly and raising his eyebrows at her beer. Jordan was obviously flustered, but dug a set of keys out of her purse and handed them over. Rich took the keys and returned to his "head" table without another word. Jordan and Kendall were outraged by this incident. "I am having *one* beer," Jordan immediately said in a hushed whisper to Kendall and I. "Chris comes in here and has beers all the time and drives the Jeep and no one ever says anything. There are some *serious* inconsistencies going on here." She shook her head in annoyance.

During my first day at the office, I observed Steve ask Office Manager Sandra to review that month's expenditure by the team. Sandra agreed and quickly presented Steve with a stack of papers which contained financial information. Standing close together, the two went over the line items, figuring out where each charge came from. Steve directed a series of rapid-fire questions about each item at Sandra. What was this item? Why was it so much? Is this a necessary charge? I described the scene later by writing that it seemed that Steve was quizzing Sandra on her knowledge of finance.

In the same way that Steve seemingly tested Sandra, he often appeared in front of other female staff unexpectedly in order to oversee and question their work. These surprise visits did not happen to male staff, and generated a lot of anxiety. On days when I arrived at the office before either Jordan or Grace, they commonly asked me, often with a degree of trepidation, whether Steve had arrived for the day yet. This was to prepare themselves for the possibility that

Steve would appear to question them. In early June, Steve appeared without warning in the doorway to the office room I shared with Jordan and Grace. Without greeting anyone in the room, Steve announced, "I need an update about plans for Public Service Night. This is July 23rd?" Looking up from her cubicle, Jordan nodded and said "Yes." "We have city and state?" Steve asked, referencing participation in the game's events by city and state public officials. Jordan nodded again. "And county." Spotting a small stack of player trading cards on a tabletop near the door, Steve grabbed one and held it up in the air. "I have never seen these before," he said. "Why have I never seen these? Why do we have these?" Grace responded that they were cards created by the WUSA-era Momentum. As she continued to explain the cards, Steve cut her off by saying, 'Hmm. Okay," and walked out of the room. After his exit there was a long moment of silence. I noticed Grace and Jordan exchanging tense glances.

Steve's practice of surprising female staff often became intimidating. When I left the office one day around 5 pm, the long main hallway containing the staircase was dark, and I assumed that no one was present. While I walked along this hallway with my bag over my shoulder, Steve suddenly jumped out from the shadows of a dark office and yelled into my face, scaring me on purpose. When I screamed, he laughed. He had a mini Nerf football in his hand, and he threw it down the hallway to Rich, who had been hiding in a second dark office. Neither man said anything to me as I continued down the stairs to exit.

Women were also asked to perform domestic tasks, such as cleaning, that were not asked of male employees. This pattern was evident to me as early as my first full day with the team in March of 2011. After arriving at the office just before 9 am, I sat in Office Manager Sandra's office waiting to meet with Jordan. While I sat making small talk with Sandra, Steve entered the office. He surveyed the room silently, then chided Sandra in a joking tone for not having taken

out the garbage bag which sat full next to the door. Sandra laughed and apologized to Steve. In my 11 months with the team, I only ever saw women take out the garbage, vacuum the floors, or clean dishes used by staff. I was asked several times to help out in cleaning the office, perhaps indicative of my close relationship with Jordan. Male interns like Dillon were never asked to help. At 4 pm on a slow day during the season, Jordan asked me to vacuum the carpets in the office rooms along our arm of the office. Dillon gave an apologetic smile and lifted his feet so that I could vacuum underneath his cubicle, acknowledging that I was performing a type of task from which he was exempt.

Once Sasha joined the team as a consultant partway through the season, he caught on quickly to the gendered division of labor at the Momentum and began to ask women to perform menial tasks that were clearly outside of their job descriptions. For instance, Sasha entered the room I shared with Jordan one afternoon to ask if she would mail something for him. He handed Jordan several stamped and labeled envelopes. Seeing this interaction, I typed on my laptop *why is he asking her?* The mailbox was located directly outside of the office's front door. Instead of asking about the location of the nearest mailbox, Sasha simply delegated this task to Jordan. Jordan took the stack of envelopes, and sighed loudly when Sasha left the room.

F. **From Oversight to Autonomy**

In August 2011, at the immediate conclusion of the Momentum's losing season, the team lost its cadre of unpaid college interns, all of whom returned to their respective campuses. However, the team also lost both ticket manager Chris and CFO Rich at the end of the season. Both men had left to pursue other job opportunities. One consequence of these departures was the feminization of the staff, as only women remained in the post-season. In our interview over dinner, Jordan commented on this point, "I just think that, especially for your thesis, it's really

interesting that it ended up being all women in a sports team." Steve, too, seemed struck by the

new sex ratio at the Momentum. In the first formally held staff meeting in the post-season, I filed

into Steve's room, along with Jordan, Grace, Sandra, and media intern Carolyn. Seeing the group

assembled around him, Steve laughed loudly, "We need to get some male interns in here!"

Faced with a significantly downsized staff, owner Steve moved operations across town

into a smaller, cheaper office space. In early September, Jordan asked me to help pack and move

the old office into the new one. When I arrived at the old team office around 9 am, there were

quite a few cardboard boxes already filled and ready to go. Jordan, Grace, Kendall and I were

alone in the office that morning; Steve would not be coming in to help with the move. Jordan

eyed the boxes, and then the parking lot with a mischievous grin. "Here," she said to me, tossing

a set of keys in the air for me to catch. "You drive the Momentum Jeep." While there was no

reason related to moving for me to drive the team's Jeep, as opposed to my own car, Jordan and I

had had multiple conversations throughout the season about gender inequality and the Jeep. I

took this moment as a sign of rebellion on Jordan's part, made possible by the absence of the

men who worked for the team. In my fieldnotes, I described my emotions during this scene in the

following way:

> I was elated. Elated, I tell you! I'd had visions of roaring around in the Momentum Jeep
> ever since I first saw it in March. I felt really, really tall when I got in that thing. I was in
> a monster truck, ready to mow down all those detractors of women's sport and women's
> work in sport that I'm forced to interact with.

I offer this moment as one illustration of how gendered office dynamics changed and

were responded to over time with the shift in the social organization of work towards business

logic and corporate partnerships. One result of the emerging dominance of business logic was the

changing sex ratio among team employees. For men like Rich and Chris who had adopted

business logic as most appropriate in defining the Momentum's "success," the season became increasingly defined as failing given losses on the field, persistently lower attendance than desired, the inability of community appearances to bring clear, measurable value to the team, and rejection from corporate sponsors. Once other employment opportunities presented themselves, it was easy to leave the Momentum. In Chris' case, he had been talking about leaving for months. As I wrote in the introductory pages of Chapter 4, the changed sex ratio of the office was welcomed by women like Jordan, who felt deeply critical of the focus on measurable gain and felt that office morale was "more positive" after Chris and Rich's departure. The absence of men, then, was one factor that contributed to increased morale and autonomy for women over time. Although the moment I described above with the Momentum Jeep took place at the end of the season, the emerging autonomy of women in the office first began to emerge in June 2011 with initial shifts toward business logic.

Somewhat paradoxically, the increasing dominance of business logic at the Momentum also served to increase women's autonomy through decreasing the extent to which their work on cause-related initiatives was monitored. When practices that accorded with cause logic became less valued over time, there was less reason for leaders like Steve to heavily police them. Although the team did cease community events partway through the season, there remained several mandates for "empowerment" practices from league-wide sponsors that required time and attention. In order to minimally meet these demands, the Momentum developed a further exacerbated gendered division of labor which saw women responsible for fulfilling cause mandates. Increasingly, men took care of the "business" side of team operations, which became increasingly valued and central, while women took care of cause" goals, which were necessary, but secondary to the team's success. For instance, the league had signed an apparel deal with a

national sports apparel company. As a national sponsor, each team was required to meet the demands of the contract. This company had a program to raise money for breast cancer research and awareness, called Project Pink, and part of the league's contract with this sponsor included involvement in this charity program. The Momentum was to hold a breast cancer themed Project Pink home game. All of the uniforms and balls used in the game would be pink, the company was donating several hundred pink mini soccer balls to be given to fans, and a portion of ticket proceeds would go to a local breast cancer organization to be chosen by fans. As this program fit a cause logic focus by raising money for a disease that predominantly impacts women, it was eagerly taken up by Jordan and Grace, the two staff members designated to organize and promote the event. Jordan, Grace, and I worked with media interns Carolyn and Samantha

When I joined the team before the season began, all work needed the approval of either Steve or Rich before it could move forward, as with the newsletter issues or fan survey content. Once I took over newsletter production in July 2011, after the crucial series of staff meetings that I documented above, I realized that this had changed. The oversight that had once been applied to my work, and the work of Jordan and Grace, no longer existed. In early August 2011, at the tail end of the season, I documented this shift in my fieldnotes:

> I smile to myself thinking about how the process of sending the newsletter has evolved. Early on (Volume 28), I had to send it to Jordan and Grace to be forwarded on and approved by Rich, and then by them, and then I could send it. Now, I send it to Jordan and Grace but don't always hear anything back from them, and it's never sent to Rich. Jordan said that the current draft "looked nice" when she passed my cubicle and I just went ahead and sent it.

The women in the office used this leeway to implement new cause practices that had empowerment, rather than direct, measurable gain, as their primary aim. Jordan, Grace and Kendall brainstormed new initiatives around cause-related goals entirely on their own. While

they reported their progress on community work in staff meetings, they were only rarely asked about this directly by either Steve or Rich. In the second half of the season, empowerment work was secondary to assessing the financials of the team and coming up with practices to improve the bottom line. While it was required, especially in the case of the national apparel sponsor, it was of only peripheral importance to the real business of selling tickets and corporate deals. Jordan, with help from Grace and Kendall, came up with two new game-day initiatives meant to honor individuals or groups in the local area who had made positive contributions to the community – Mom of the Match, and Champions in the Community. Jordan enlisted the help of Abbie, Steve's personal assistant, in accepting nominations and selecting winners for each home game. The Mom of the Match award was designed explicitly to honor a local woman, and both Jordan and Abbie selected girls or women as winners of the Champions in the Community award when possible. Jordan told me several times how passionately she felt about this initiative and its potential to positively impact the community.

Towards the end of the season, Jordan and Grace decided to create an end-of-season award for the player who had been the most involved in the community. A hot August afternoon in the office room I shared with other female employees saw lively debate emerge as to how to give out this award. Grace asked intern Carolyn her opinion as to who amongst the players had been the most involved in "community stuff." Carolyn, a mid-20s woman who dressed only in black and had long, brown hair to her waist, responded, "Like volume? Or quality?" For volume, Carolyn suggested defender Lindsey, but added that Lindsey might not be good for the award on quality dimensions because "most of her activities are based on her job." Here, Carolyn was referencing Lindsey's work as a girls' soccer coach. While this work had made Lindsey well known to the local youth soccer community, and groups of young girls clustered around Lindsey

when she appeared in public, the paid nature of this work brought Lindsey's motivations for community work into question.

Other names were thrown out. "What about Nicole?" Jordan asked, referring to the team's captain. "Oh yeah, the dog thing!" Grace recalled, thinking of a newsletter article I had written on Nicole's work with a local animal rescue. "And the tornado thing!" Carolyn added. During the season, severe tornados had ripped through towns in a nearby state, killing multiple people and causing major structural damage. Several players, including captain Nicole, had organized a team fundraiser in response. "Ooh, I like that," Grace said. She then told the room a story about Nicole she remembered from a home game. She had been walking near Nicole after the game and had heard a young girl call from the stands for an autograph. Because the girl did not have anything to be signed, Nicole had taken off her cleats, signed one, and handed it up to the girl. Grace told the story with clear admiration, and Jordan, Carolyn, and I were enthusiastic in our response. This story established Nicole as the clear frontrunner for the award. This award was never communicated to Steve, but was organized by female staff members without his awareness or approval and given out at the team's end-of-season party, held in Steve's home.

In conclusion of this chapter, my participant observation with the Momentum as an unpaid staff member revealed an important shift in the balance of business and cause logics as they structured the work of selling women's soccer throughout 2011. While it is clearly the case that some of this shift had taken place after the 2010 season with the downsizing of the staff, I document a clear trend toward the increased dominance of business logic through the league's failing in early 2012. Prior to the start of the 2011 season, both business and cause practices were valued by both team leadership and staff as important to success. Importantly, however, cause-related practices, such as community and charity events, were valued only to the extent that they

brought directly measurable gain to the team. Game attendance was the primary metric by which outreach to local girls was assessed by Steve, although these events were believed by women to have more intrinsic value.

When attendance numbers were persistently low, the cause approach was deemed failing by those men who firmly believed that profit was an important and central goal for women's soccer. In this context, business practices related to corporate sponsorship were allotted additional time and resources. The dominance of business logic was further entrenched with the entrance of Sasha as a consultant to the team.

The shift from logic balance to business dominance had implications for gender inequality at the level of staff interactions. Throughout my time in the field, paternalism was the defining feature of relations between male team leaders and female staff. Female staff members were routinely monitored, their work surveyed and scrutinized in ways that were never true for male staff. The team had a strongly gendered division of labor, with women taking on domestic tasks outside of their formal job descriptions. While this paternalism was never eliminated, it did lessen over time, but only in the area of cause-related practices. The shift toward business dominance spurred forward by Steve resulted in a gender paradox – once certain categories of work, such as community events and the empowerment of girls, were less valuable to the team, they opened up new spaces of agency and autonomy for women who believed strongly in the value of soccer's inspiration of girls.

XI. CONCLUSION

A.   **<u>Summary</u>**

In February 2012, after a meeting of the Board of Directors, Women's Professional Soccer disbanded. The league's folding took place approximately a month after the league had suspended operations for the 2012 season. Momentum owner Steve was deeply upset over these events. On the January day of the suspension announcement, he blasted loud, sad songs from within his closed office, speaking to no one all day, while Jordan, Grace and I anxiously followed public discussion of the league's future via Twitter. A few weeks after the league folded, in an informal interview, Steve acknowledged to me that as the head of the Board, he had voiced support for the decision to end the league. He did not wish to discuss the league's demise in-depth, but said about my research with the team, "You certainly have a lot of good material."

While it had been clear to those both inside and outside the league that major challenges had emerged in recent months, most notably a lawsuit with a team owner and conflict with U.S. Soccer over the number of teams required for a sanctioned league, it had not been clear that these challenges spelled the demise of the league. Reading a news article about the league's struggles with U.S. Soccer in December, for instance, Kendall commented to me that the issue was overblown, as it "didn't mean the dissolution of the league."

Public debate in news articles and over social media and soccer blogs was complex and often contentious, but a common question ran through much of what I read in the weeks following the league's failure: what had gone wrong? While it seemed plausible that the lawsuit and ensuing U.S. Soccer debacle had been adequate to sink the league, there remained suspicion on this point in many corners, a persistent feeling that something else had been going on behind

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the scenes. WPS' folding seemed an almost eerie repetition of the trajectory of WUSA, which also folded somewhat unexpectedly after three seasons a decade earlier.

My position as participant observer inside the Momentum gave me a unique vantage point from which to understand the league's folding. I contend that in fact there was something else going on inside women's soccer separate from the lawsuit. That "something else" is the story I have told in the previous chapters.

My observation and interview data reveal that that for those working for and with WPS, women's soccer as a professional organization is located within two distinct social fields, the youth sport field and the professional sport field. As a for-profit, fully professional league, WPS was clearly a player in the field of U.S. professional sport, and saw men's professional sport leagues as reference points to be emulated. At the same time, women's soccer has developed through processes of "domestication" (Keyes, 2013) at the youth level and within the education system. Many saw WPS as something of an extension of youth soccer. The league's dual existence in multiple fields is a result of the complex gender, racial/ethnic, and classed meanings that have attached to the sport of soccer given its unique development in the past half-century.

Soccer in the contemporary U.S. exists as part of a gender paradox. The enormous popularity of soccer as a participation sport for girls and women is tied directly to its cultural marginalization at the most elite level of play. The peripheral cultural location of soccer outside of the U.S. mainstream is precisely what has given women opportunities in the game. For some scholars and women's soccer stakeholders, the position of "exceptionalism" accorded women in soccer (Markovits and Hellerman, 2001) indicates the potential of women's soccer, more so than other women's sports, to break into the institutional core of sport. On the other hand, the longstanding dominance of both male athletes and Big Four sports within this core signal the

difficulties of capitalizing on soccer's exceptionalism for women. Women's professional soccer was perceived to be simultaneously disadvantaged in comparison to men's professional sport teams, but also best located of all women's sports leagues to break through the institutional hegemony.

The background experiences of those individuals tied to WPS had familiarized them with the worlds of both youth sport and professional sport. In most cases, they had first learned to view soccer as a marginal sport in the U.S., and only secondly began to define soccer as a girls' and youth sport once they had children. However, the multiple meanings of soccer created a strong sense of uncertainty as to the chances for WPS' long term sustainability.

I document two institutional logics that emanated from each of the social fields soccer is a part of: business logic and cause logic. These logics spell out different definitions of success for women's soccer. While business logic presents profit as the central goal of a sports organization, generated largely through television and corporate partner contracts, cause logic holds that the inspiration of girls and women is an important goal for women's soccer, achieved through the role modeling of female athletes at public appearances. I show that both logics were present as part of the founding narrative of the league in 2009, as owners of teams were motivated by their daughters' sport participation and by the potential for commercial success.

There did exist a clear gender division in logic adoption, with men more likely to endorse business logic and women cause logic, although gendered patterns were by no means absolute. I argue that the greater investment of women in the cause approach stemmed from their own experiences with sport as a source of inspiration and empowerment, and from the experiences of older (35+) women of being excluded from sport participation. Interestingly, those men who did acknowledge cause logic often wrapped it into the business definition of success; inspiring

women and girls was a useful goal for women's soccer to the extent that it contributed to the likelihood of profit.

The way these logics informed practice at the Momentum throughout 2011 was influenced strongly by the gendered hierarchy of the office staff. Men simply had more decision making power over the direction of work. When men such as owner Steve were on board with the cause approach as one route toward profit, daily practice demonstrated logic balance. The team undertook a wide variety of community events, charity appearances, and playing clinics, most of which targeted girls and women. They believed that making the players visible to other women in local and regional communities would spark buy-in to the team, and expected attendance numbers to be high as a result. At the same time, they pursued partnerships with local and regional corporations, being limited in the possibility of television contracts by a league-wide deal with FOX Soccer. In both arenas, the team experienced more failure than success. Attendance was never as high as desired or expected, and corporate gatekeepers routinely declined to sponsor the team. What was important about failure was the way it was interpreted. For those who saw the team through the lens of cause logic, these rejections were evidence of ongoing sexism and the deeply, problematically gendered nature of sport. The perceived existence of gender discrimination served to solidify a commitment to the cause approach, as it was deemed necessary and important to challenging the marginalization of women in sport. In contrast, business logic adherents understood failure as a lack of interest on the part of potential investors and evidence of the inferiority of female athletes on the level playing field of the market.

The response of Momentum leadership over time was to label cause initiatives as failing and ramp up attempts at corporate money as the only route towards profit. A series of major staff

meetings affected this shift. Sasha's entrance to the team was an additional, crucial moment in the shift toward the valuing of corporate partnerships above community appearances. While enacted by men, and Steve most specifically, the shift from logic balance to the dominance of the business approach in structuring work was not responded to passively or uniformly by staff, but was engaged with dynamically. Rich and Chris both left the team partly as a response to their perceptions that the team was, and would always be, failing. The women in the office, including Grace, Jordan, Kendall, Carolyn, and Sandra, fought to maintain a focus on community and charity work. They came up with practices, such as the end-of-season player award, that while small, rewarded the inspiration of girls and women as valuable work apart from potential revenue generation.

In a second gender paradox, the shift from logic balance to business dominance impacted the social relationships between male and female staff members in the direction of greater autonomy for women. While women's work was heavily policed when cause practices, for which women were disproportionately responsible, were highly valued by leadership, the paternalistic oversight that existed at the beginning of the season lessened over time. As empowerment became less valued, women gained more leeway to shape the conditions of their work.

At the time of the lawsuit, Momentum owner and league-wide Board director Steve possessed a framing of his team as failing according to the definition of success he had adopted. While I do not make the case that the processes I document were the sole or direct cause of the league's failure, it is nevertheless likely that the events I write about internal to the Momentum were part of larger conversations about the league's health.

B.   **Contributions to Theory**

One major goal of this research was to shed light on the workings of the Momentum as a women's sport organization. This project was a response to previous studies of women's sport focusing either on micro-level identity constructions among female athletes or on macro-level social institutions as the building blocks of gender and sexuality inequality in sport. The meso-level of organizations has been notably absent from existing literature, an unfortunate oversight given the importance of formal organizations to sport. Few studies to date have approached the question of women's sport in such a way as to bridge the micro, meso, and macro levels of analysis. This dissertation has employed a tripartite theoretical approach to the study of women's professional soccer as a distinctly gendered organization.

First, my research contributes new insight to the institutional logics perspective in organization studies. Recent research on the institutional environments of organizations shows that institutional pressures are commonly multiple; organizational fields may not be characterized by a single, dominant logic, but by several different logics.

The bulk of research studies on institutional logics in organizational fields document cases of one logic displacing another over time, assuming that institutional pluralism is a largely transitory stage (Hinings, 2012; Kodeih and Greenwood, 2013; Thornton, 2004). Thornton (2004), for instance, explores how the emergence of a commercial logic in higher education publishing quickly displaced an earlier editorial logic, and shows what the consequences of this shift were for organizational practices. However, recent work has questioned the assumption that conflicting pressures are a passing feature of organizations; instead, they may be more permanent features of contemporary environments, where organizations are increasingly asked to manage social goals while remaining effective (Yu, 2013).

Previous scholarship has looked to those features of organizations that impact how conflicting logics are responded to. While a variety of factors, including size, field position, and governance structure have been suggested as important, I would like to call attention to two primary organizational features present in existing research: power and identity. First, prior research holds that logics impact organizational practices through interactional processes that establish a "negotiated order," given that different groups are often adherents of one logic above another. Power shapes how institutional logics are understood and responded to through processes of group contestation. As Yu argues, "Group contests for status and power are a key mechanism by which actors enact institutional logics and become especially salient in pluralistic conditions" (2013, p. 107). To date, the power that individuals bring to the "negotiated order" within organizations has been conceptualized around placement within existing organizational hierarchies. In addition, much of the literature has defined power as ownership, as Greenwood et al. (2011) note. Individuals in ownership and leadership positions have greater ability to influence organizational response to multiple institutional pressures.

Secondly, identity has been theorized as central to the negotiation of institutionally complex environments at the organizational level. Identity here is defined as the organization's sense of itself and its purpose relative to other organizations in its field. How an organization responds to an institutional logic depends, in part, on whether it perceives the logic to be a threat to its identity or as an opportunity to further solidify its identity. Kadeih and Greenword (2013) call identity a "filter" through which institutional forces are perceived, and thus responded to. In the case of French business schools they studied, a newer global logic was deemed an opportunity for "status reconfiguration" for schools with a non-elite identity, but as an opportunity for "status extension" among elite-identified schools. Both types of school worked to

actively to incorporate multiple logics into practice, but the non-elite schools were far less conservative in their work to engage practices in pursuit of international competitiveness.

No research to my knowledge has defined either group power or identity through social location, or explored how social location is patterned by and through job and authority structures, as well as identity processes within organizations. The influence of race/ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and class to organizational processes has been understudied (Holvino, 2010). In engaging with the literature in institutional logics, I suggest conceptualizing power and identity in somewhat new ways that take social location into account.

My research supports the premise that group-based contestation shapes how multiple institutional logics are responded to within organizations, and that the resulting "negotiated order," which is likely temporary and fragmented, often reflects the interests of the group with greater formal decision making authority (Pache and Santos, 2010). As in prior research, the two groups of adherents of each logic map alongside the formal authority structure of the team, with the group possessing more formal decision making power (men) adherents of the business approach, and the group with the lower amount of formal decision making power (women) adherents of a cause approach. The finding that business logic increasingly organized practices over time suggests that the sex composition of the team's staffing hierarchy was one important factor shaping the Momentum's response to multiple logics; the demographic composition of organizations has not been included as a relevant variable in prior analyses.

Yet explaining the emerging dominance of business logic with recourse only to logic adherence across the team's formal job hierarchy does not do full justice to my data. This is because group contestation between men and women, as adherents of different logics, did not map perfectly onto formal workplace hierarchies. Assistant General Manager Kelsey, for

instance, possessed a good deal more formal decision making power than intern Dillon, and yet Dillon, as a strong believer in the business approach, was closer socially and spatially to the most powerful members of the staff and was allowed to speak equally as long in staff meetings. While power has been defined as leadership or formal authority, I suggest that power also be studied as a distinctly gendered phenomenon, particularly within sport organizations. Bridging institutional logics theory with gendered organizations theory, as well as prior research on sport organizations, I posit that power also operates through sets of gendered cultural expectations for men and women (Ridgeway, 2011). In sport organizations, desired attributes such as "leadership" are often understood in masculine terms (Anderson, 2009). It was absolutely the case for the Momentum that "competence" was understood as deeply gendered, with women expected to be less competent than men. I suggest that these expectations impact how group contestation over logics plays out by shaping whose voices are most heard and whose perspectives are given more weight, above and beyond formal authority structures.

I also suggest that identity be conceptualized beyond an organization-level attribute to comprise an individual- and group-level characteristic important to understanding how logics are worked out in practice. As both business and cause logics contained inherently gendered meanings and assumptions in their field-level manifestations, these meanings were open to staff at the Momentum as something of a resource for constructing personal and workplace identities that were highly gendered. Although only lightly touched upon in the previous chapters, much of my data show that the deployment of business logic among men served to reinforce constructions of dominant masculinity (Acker, 1990; 2006). In addition to understanding practices as derived from organizational identity, practices may also be tied up with the construction of individual

identity; this may be particularly true within sport organizations, given the centrality of organized sport to contemporary hegemonic masculinities (Sibson, 2010).

Previous studies in the institutional logics perspective also typically assume that contention and conflict are most characteristic of how organizations experience and manage institutional pluralism. However, logics may exist not only in contention with one another as incompatible sets of prescriptions, but in cooperation in how they inform organizational goals and practices. A recent focus on "hybrid" organizations spotlights processes through which "institutional complexity" (Greenwood et al., 2011) is managed by adopting elements of multiple logics into organizational structures and practices (Battilana and Dorado, 2010; Pache and Santos, 2010). Also, little work has examined how logic balance changes over time. My own research here documents processes of logic negotiation that shifted from cooperation and hybridity to contestation. I follow Pache and Santos (2010) in defining logic (in)compatability with reference to organizational goals and the means, or practices, relevant to meeting those goals. In the 2011 preseason, the different practices suggested within business and cause logics were dually adopted because team leadership subsumed these practices under their preferred goal of profit generation. The division of staff along the lines of preferred goal for the team (profit vs. empowerment) was of little importance when a wide variety of practices were endorsed and supported at the highest level. Calling attention to the distinction between goals and practices, in the vein of Pache and Santos (2010), the division in goal endorsement became a more important fault line over time once select practices were perceived to be ineffective and were no longer supported.

Similar to Yu's (2013) "critical events" in effecting a shift from contestation over logics to cooperation in labor unions, I highlight the importance of big events, such as game days or

meetings with major corporations, to the reconfiguration of logic (im)balance at the Momentum. Both type of event, games and corporate meetings, were the focus of targeted attention for days, if not weeks, before they took place. These moments, which were visible to all within a small office and discussed openly, served as key check in points for all members of the staff. After major home games or big meetings with potential corporate investors, staff meetings were held to debate these events and their outcomes. These staff meetings were ground zero for the "negotiated order" in the office. However, event outcomes, and namely the disappointment that came along with frequent rejection or low game attendance, were mobilized in group settings as evidence that certain sets of practices were ineffective compared to others.

Finally, the question of how organizations manage multiple, often conflicting institutional imperatives holds importance because of the implications for valued organizational outcomes. Previous research has tied the management of multiple logics to organizational success such that "organizational survival may even be at stake" (Greenwood et al., 2011, p. 319). Successful hybridity has been linked to greater organizational stability, while sustained conflict may lead to failure (Yu, 2013). For example, Battilana and Dorado (2010) compare two microfinance organizations in Bolivia. They argue that organizational sustainability is fostered through development and communication of an organizational identity that merges elements of multiple logics and thus precludes the formation of other, competing identities among subgroups. The microfinance organization which did not successfully communicate a hybrid identity for itself to staff saw growing conflict, as staff were not brought together by a common purpose. Over time, the organization itself declined, experienced a change in leadership, and saw the resignation of employees. My research with the Momentum suggests that only a hybridity that aligns both goals and the means to attain them may be tied to success, as a hybridity of practices

without an alignment of underlying goals falls apart rather easily. One possible implication of

my research is that mode of communication may impact the potential development of hybrid

identity – while Battilana and Dorado (2010) focus on formal staff training programs as means of

socialization, communication amongst staff at the Momentum took place largely at staff

meetings, which were often spontaneous, informal, and disorganized.

While I hold that the institutional logics perspective is expanded through incorporation of

elements of gendered organizations theory, I also believe that my research makes a contribution

to gendered organizations theory itself. Acker's original formulation of the gendered

organizations perspective included a component that she called "organizational logic." As she

later clarified, her conception of organizational logic is as part of a "gendered substructure," or

"often-invisible processes in the ordinary lives of organizations in which gendered assumptions

about women and men, femininity and masculinity, are embedded and reproduced, and gender

inequalities perpetuated" (2012, p. 215). In this formulation, logics are "understandings about

how organizations are put together," or sets of meanings that adhere to organizational forms. To

date, Acker's framework has been employed to study how gender operates internal to single

organizational settings, with scholars exploring how and to what extent particular organizational

case studies are gendered at multiple levels of analysis (Britton, 2000; Dye and Mills, 2012).

Thus the concept of organizational logic as it has been used in this theoretical paradigm is

closely aligned with workplace culture. While Acker's use of gendered substructure and

organizational logic has resulted in deep understandings of gendered processes across many

types of organization, I hold that replacing "organizational logic" with "institutional logic"

reinvigorates gendered organizations theory through opening up new points of comparison and

new ways that contemporary organizations may serve to construct gender inequality. This

approach moves scholarship beyond single organizations to broader considerations of field-level structures and processes as they impact gender not just within, but also across organizations.

C. **Feminism and Women's Sport**

What has been termed the "liberal feminist" model of women's sport (Heywood and Dworkin, 2003) or the "marketeer" model (McKay, 1997) seeks women's entrée into the male-dominated sports world vis-à-vis separate opportunity structures. In this perspective, women's participation in competitive, commercial sport, along with the development of teams, leagues, and organizations for women, challenges the longstanding cultural association of sport with men and masculinity, and champions definitions of femininity which incorporate strength, assertiveness, and physical activity (Adams and Bettis, 2003; Davis and Weaving, 2010; Heywood and Dworkin, 2003).

Within this paradigm, activism surrounding women and sport, then, should be aimed at combating exclusionary techniques and structures and expanding sporting opportunities for girls and women (Davis and Weaving, 2010). Much of the justification for this model of the feminist transformation of sport relies on the supposed "sociopositive" effects and consequences of sports participation. Scraton and Flintoff argue that, "The underlying assumption of all liberal sports feminism is that sport is fundamentally sound and represents a positive experience to which girls and women need access" (2013, p. 97).

Embracing the liberal feminist model of sport has historically been part of a push for women's inclusion in previously male-dominated spaces and institutions. The goals of increasing female participation in sport and gaining cultural visibility and recognition have met with some success. Female athletes and women's athleticism more generally have become more visible in the media and the U.S. cultural imagination in the past several decades (Heywood and Dworkin,

2003). Girl's and women's participation in organized sport has skyrocketed with increased opportunity. As Davis and Weaving (2010) note, inclusion itself can be conceptualized as a form of liberation and empowerment.

However, liberal feminist discourse on empowerment and access to previously male-dominated spaces glosses over the relations of power and material structures of inequality that allow some, but not all, women to benefit from sports participation and increased opportunity. Racial/ethnic and socioeconomic gaps in sport participation are evidence of the limitations of the liberal feminist approach to inclusion (Scraton and Flintoff, 2013). In addition, liberal feminism does little to dislodge the existing value structure of sport.

What do we learn about liberal feminism in women's sport from the case of the Momentum, and from taking up the perspectives of staff internal to Women's Professional Soccer? Several findings may be instructive on this point. While the goals of the cause approach to selling the sport, which include inspiration, empowerment, and motivation for girls and women, are clearly wrapped up in the liberal feminist focus on role modeling, participation, and opportunity, the cause approach was not perceived by many women or men to be feminist.

For some, this viewpoint emerged from a fear of the social repercussions of adopting an explicitly feminist politic for women's soccer. Women, as well as a single man, who believed in empowerment as an important goal for the league with inherent value outside of considerations of profit, adopted what Giffort (2011) calls "implicit feminism." Some staff members declined to label their work as overtly feminist while still pursuing feminist goals under what they perceived as socially accepted framings.

For many others, including the majority of men I spoke to, empowerment was endorsed not as a strategy for social change toward greater gender equality, but as a marketing tactic

toward greater profit for team and league ownership. Here, "empowerment" was packaged and sold to girls as a product and an experience. That the team marketed itself explicitly to racially and socioeconomically privileged groups as their target "market" is evidence of how distant transformation towards equality truly was as an organizational goal.

Giffort (2011) suggests that implicit feminism emerges in organizations characterized by anti- or post-feminist environments. While there is a degree of contention over the meaning of "post-feminist," (Gill, 2007) I take it to signal the dual incorporation and depoliticization of feminism. Post-feminist narratives position feminism as passé and irrelevant given the accomplishment of gender equality and presumption that structural forms of discrimination have been defeated. One consequence of post-feminism is that it denies girls and women the language with which to describe and speak out against gender injustice (Pomerantz, Raby, and Stefanik, 2013).

My study of the Momentum provides evidence for how post-feminist contexts operate in professional women's sport organizations. I would identify business logic as a contemporary post-feminist narrative. In its field-level instantiation, business logic defines the contemporary playing field for female athletes as level under the assumption that gender inequality has been eliminated in sport. In a context assumed to be bias- and discrimination-free, market principles define the possibilities for women in sport. While this logic takes on the appearance of gender-neutrality, its application in sport serves to justify and legitimize resource disparities between women's and men's sport through the discourse of "interest" and with recourse to the inferiority of the female body.

I argue that the current post-feminist environment for women's sport is an important consideration when thinking through the adoption of liberal feminism, explicitly or implicitly, in

contemporary sport settings. It would be easy to criticize those empowerment feminists as ignorant of the limitations of this model and complicit in the reproduction of social relations of power. However, a solely individual-level focus does not fully allow for a view of women's soccer staff as active social agents who make decisions given the contextual and institutional circumstances they are in. Empowerment feminism was perceived to be the most (and maybe only) "safe" way to embrace progressive gender goals at all without alienating important sources of financial visibility and support, as feminist ideas about opportunity, role modeling and empowerment had achieved a degree of institutionalization in American popular culture. Alternative feminist visions for women's soccer were understood as antithetical to the league's survival as an organization.

D. **<u>Recommendations</u>**

As of this writing in March 2014, a new women's professional soccer league is on the scene. The National Women's Soccer League (NWSL) began play in 2013, and is soon to begin its second season. If I had the opportunity to sit down with NWSL leaders and discuss my results and their implications, I would bring up several points as food for thought.

I would acknowledge the need for the league, and each team within it, to balance financially solvency with social goals around inspiring local girls through role modeling in sport. I would highlight the existence of divergent understandings of why the league should pursue empowerment, with some believing that girls are a market to be targeted for profit, with others feeling that empowerment motivations hold intrinsic value beyond financial considerations. As organization scholars have shown, the hybridization of logics is important to the effectiveness, sustainability, and growth of organizations. Thus, for women's soccer to increase its odds of survival, it should and must develop an organizational identity that merges social and financial

goals and pursues both in organizational practice. This means that dissimilar understandings of empowerment within women's soccer will have to be reconciled. The development of a truly hybridized identity is likely only possible with open discussion and debate across lines of power and authority. I would suggest that the league open up discussions of the its future beyond ownership to comprise other paid staff members within each team.

In order to promote collaborative discussion across lines of power, the league must consider how gendered workplace cultures may operate to silence women's contributions. Although there is certain to be variation across teams, a discussion of the experiences of women at the Momentum will push the NWSL to consider how it might intervene to promote more inclusive and egalitarian team cultures. I would encourage NWSL teams to examine their formal hierarchies and formal and informal divisions of labor. Who is allowed to speak, and who is heard? I would suggest that the league must engage in conscious practices of inclusion within their own ranks.

A hybridized identity must also be effectively communicated and transmitted to staff and players, so that everyone is on board with the goals of the league. As prior research has found, communication of organizational identity is often effective through formal training and socialization programs. The league does not currently have such programs. I would encourage the league to view training as a valuable use of resources.

Finally, I would suggest that the league take a look at their hiring and promotion practices and policies, because who is at the table matters. The backgrounds of individuals who work in women's soccer, defined both as social location and as sport experience, integrally shape the goals and strategies adopted for the organization of work. As other scholars of sport have concluded, diversity in leadership is positively related to organizational effectiveness. I, too,

would stress the need for diverse leadership groups. Diversity across gender is clearly important

given the major gender divides I found in WPS. I would also suggest that diversity across work

background may also be important. In addition to those with corporate backgrounds, I

hypothesize that those from the nonprofit sector would be well positioned to understand the

challenges of women's pro soccer. In pursuing leadership diversity, inclusive workplace

practices, multiple, equally valued goals, and open lines of communication, the NWSL may have

potential to outlast WPS' three season existence. I believe all this is worth doing because a stable

women's professional soccer league with widespread cultural visibility provides a foundation for

future work towards feminist social change.

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APPENDIX

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS
AT CHICAGO

Office for the Protection of Research Subjects (OPRS)
Office of the Vice Chancellor for Research (MC 672)
203 Administrative Office Building
1737 West Polk Street
Chicago, Illinois 60612-7227

Exemption Granted

September 21, 2010

Rachel Allison, BA
Sociology
4112 BSB
1007 W Harrison St, M/C 312
Chicago, IL 60612
Phone: (563) 209-1822

RE: **Research Protocol # 2010-0731**
"Kicking Off: Organizational Aims and Strategies Within Women's Professional Soccer"

Dear Ms. Allison:

Your Claim of Exemption was reviewed on September 20, 2010 and it was determined that you research meets the criteria for exemption. You may now begin your research.

Approval Period: 20 September 2010 – 19 September 2013

Your research may be conducted at UIC and with Adults.

The specific exemption category under 45 CFR 46.101(b) is:

(2) Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior, unless: (i) information obtained is recorded in such a manner that human subjects can be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects; and (ii) any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation.

Please note the Review History of this submission

APPENDIX (continued)

Receipt Date	Submission Type	Review Process	Review Date	Review Action
08/30/2010	Initial Review	Expedited	09/07/2010	Modifications Required
09/15/2010	Response To Modifications	Exempt	09/20/2010	Approved

You are reminded that investigators whose research involving human subjects is determined to be exempt from the federal regulations for the protection of human subjects still have responsibilities for the ethical conduct of the research under state law and UIC policy. Please be aware of the following UIC policies and responsibilities for investigators:

1. Amendments You are responsible for reporting any amendments to your research protocol that may affect the determination of the exemption and may result in your research no longer being eligible for the exemption that has been granted.

2. Record Keeping You are responsible for maintaining a copy all research related records in a secure location in the event future verification is necessary, at a minimum these documents include: the research protocol, the claim of exemption application, all questionnaires, survey instruments, interview questions and/or data collection instruments associated with this research protocol, recruiting or advertising materials, any consent forms or information sheets given to subjects, or any other pertinent documents.

3. Final Report When you have completed work on your research protocol, you should submit a final report to the Office for Protection of Research Subjects (OPRS).

4. Information for Human Subjects UIC Policy requires investigators to provide information about the research protocol to subjects and to obtain their permission prior to their participating in the research. The information about the research protocol should be presented to subjects in writing or orally from a written script. When appropriate, the following information must be provided to all research subjects participating in exempt studies:

   a. The researchers affiliation; UIC, JBVMAC or other institutions,
   b. The purpose of the research,
   c. The extent of the subject's involvement and an explanation of the procedures to be followed,
   d. Whether the information being collected will be used for any purposes other than the proposed research,
   e. A description of the procedures to protect the privacy of subjects and the confidentiality of the research information and data,
   f. Description of any reasonable foreseeable risks,
   g. Description of anticipated benefit,
   h. A statement that participation is voluntary and subjects can refuse to participate or can stop at any time

APPENDIX (continued)

    i.   A statement that the researcher is available to answer any questions that the subject may have and which includes the name and phone number of the investigator(s).

    j.   A statement that the UIC IRB/OPRS or JBVMAC Patient Advocate Office is available if there are questions about subject's rights, which includes the appropriate phone numbers.

Please be sure to:

→ Use your research protocol number (2010-0731) on any documents or correspondence with the IRB concerning your research protocol.

We wish you the best as you conduct your research. If you have any questions or need further help, please contact the OPRS office at (312) 996-1711 or me at (312) 996-2014. Please send any correspondence about this protocol to OPRS at 203 AOB, M/C 672.

               Sincerely,

               Sandra Costello
               Assistant Director, IRB # 2
               Office for the Protection of Research Subjects

cc: Barbara Risman, Sociology, M/C 312

VITA

RACHEL ALLISON

EDUCATION

2014   PhD, Sociology, University of Illinois at Chicago
     Dissertation: *Gender and the Organization of Women's Professional Soccer*
     Committee: Barbara Risman (chair), William Bielby, Paul-Brian McInerney,
     Michael Messner, and Pamela Popielarz

2009   MA, Sociology, University of Illinois at Chicago
     Thesis: *Race, Gender and Attitudes Toward War in Chicago: An Intersectional Analysis*
     Committee: Barbara J. Risman (chair) and Anthony Orum

2007   BA, Sociology/French, Grinnell College

RESEARCH AND TEACHING INTERESTS

Gender, Sexuality, Intersectionality, Sociology of Sport, Organizations, Qualitative Methods, Quantitative Methods

PEER-REVIEWED PUBLICATIONS

Allison, R., Risman, B.J.: "It goes hand in hand with the parties": race, class and residence in college student negotiations of hooking up. <u>Sociological Perspectives</u> 57;102-123: 2014.

Allison, R., Risman, B.J.: A double standard for "hooking up": how far have we come toward gender equality? <u>Social Science Research</u> 42;1191-1206: 2013.

Davis, G., Allison, R.: White coats, black specialists? racial divides in the medical profession. <u>Sociological Spectrum</u> 33;510-533: 2013.

Davis, G., Allison, R.: Increasing representation, maintaining hierarchy: an assessment of gender and medical specialization. <u>Social Thought and Research</u> 32;17-45: 2013.

Allison, R.: Race, gender and attitudes toward war in chicago: an intersectional analysis. <u>Sociological Forum</u> 26;668-691: 2011.

OTHER WRITING

2014   **Allison, Rachel**. "Hooking Up as a College Culture." *Gender & Society* blog. Available at gendersociety.wordpress.com.

2013   **Allison, Rachel**. Review of The Urban Geography of Boxing: Race, Class and Gender in the Ring. *Race, Gender & Class* 20, 1-2: 361-363.

2011   **Allison, Rachel**. "Title IX, Women and Sport: An Update." Fact sheet prepared for Sociologists for Women in Society. Available at www.socwomen.org

CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

2014   We're Taking Over! Constructing a Fan Base in Women's Professional Soccer. Paper presented at the meeting of the Midwest Sociological Society, Omaha, NE, and at the meeting of Society for the Sociological Study of Social Problems, San Francisco, CA.

Women's Professional Sport: What Can We Learn from the Case of Women's Soccer? Presented at the Mirror of our Culture: Sport and Society in America conference, St. Norbert, WI.

2013   Gender, Contested Institutional Logics, and the Failure of Women's Professional Soccer. Paper presented at the Center for Research on Women and Gender, University of Illinois at Chicago, Chicago, IL.

Business or Cause? Gender as Contested Logic in Women's Professional Soccer. Paper presented at the meeting of the Society for the Study of Social Problems, New York, NY.

"It Goes Hand in Hand with the Parties": Race, Class and Residence in College Student Negotiations of Hooking Up (with Barbara Risman). Paper presented at the meeting of the American Sociological Association, New York, NY.

A Feel for the Game: Using Bourdieu to Theorize Gender in Sport. Paper presented at the meeting of the Midwest Sociological Society, Chicago, IL.

2012   The Sexual Double Standard Toward "Hooking Up": How Far Have we Come Toward Gender Equality? (with Barbara Risman) Paper presented at the meeting of the International Association for Relationship Research, Chicago, IL, and the meeting of the American Sociological Association, Denver, CO.

Gendered Fields? Women's Sport Fans Compare Men's and Women's Soccer. Paper presented at the meeting of the Midwest Sociological Society, Minneapolis, MN.

Organizational Aims and Strategies Within Women's Professional Soccer. Paper presented at the meeting of the North American Society for the Sociology of Sport, Minneapolis, MN.

2011   "I've Been There, Done That": Racial and Class Variation in College Women's Sexual Strategies. Invited Brown Bag at Northeastern Illinois University, Chicago, IL.

2010   How Double is the Sexual Standard for Hooking Up in College? (with Barbara Risman) Paper presented at the meeting of the American Sociological Association, Atlanta, GA, and at the meeting of the Midwest Sociological Society, Chicago, IL.

2009   An Intersectional Approach to Explaining Opinion on the Iraq War. Paper presented at the meeting of Sociologists for Women in Society, Savannah, GA, and at the meeting of the Midwest Sociological Society, Des Moines, IA.

TEACHING APPOINTMENTS

University of Illinois at Chicago
2013-14   Sociological Statistics
2012-13   Human Sexuality: Social Perspectives; Introduction to Sociological Theory

Northeastern Illinois University
2013-14   Introduction to Social Statistics; Sociological Research Methods; Introduction to
            Sociological Theory
2011-12   American Women: The Changing Image; Introduction to Sociology
2010-11   Sociology of Education

Kennesaw State University
2011-2012   Principles of Sociology

GRANTS AND AWARDS

2013   Alice J. Dan Award, Center for Research on Women and Gender, University of
               Illinois at Chicago ($500)
2013   Lee Student Support Fund Award, Society for the Study of Social Problems
               ($250)
2013   American Sociological Association Student Forum Travel Award ($225)
2013   SAGE Teaching Innovations & Professional Development Award ($500)
2013   University of Illinois President's Research in Diversity Travel Award ($600)
2012-2013   Dean's Scholar Fellowship, University of Illinois at Chicago ($20,500)
2012   Midwest Sociological Society Endowment Committee Research Grant ($1,200)
2012   University of Illinois at Chicago Gender and Women's Studies Travel Grant
               ($250)

2010	American Sociological Association Student Forum Travel Award ($225)
2010	2nd place, Midwest Sociological Society Graduate Student Paper Competition ($150)
2007	Judith Louise McKim Scholarship in Sociology, Grinnell College ($1,500)

MEDIA COVERAGE

CBS Chicago, *LA Times*, *Psychology Today*, *SELF* Magazine Blog, *St. Louis Today*, Jezebel, Slate

PROFESSIONAL SERVICE

2013-present	Newsletter Editor, SSSP Sport, Leisure and the Body Section
2011-present	Ad hoc reviewer for Routledge, *Gender & Society*, *Women's Studies in Communication, Comprehensive Journal of Education and Arts*
2012-2014	Session Organizer, Midwest Sociological Society meeting, Chicago, IL
2010-2011	Elected Student Representative, Sociologists for Women in Society

PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIPS

American Sociological Association
North American Society for the Sociology of Sport
Society for the Study of Social Problems
Southern Sociological Society
Sociologists for Women in Society

REFERENCES

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