

2006

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Repository Citation

Ridinger, Lynn and Funk, Daniel C., "Looking at Gender Differences Through the Lens of Sport Spectators" (2006). *Human Movement Sciences Faculty Publications*. 33.
https://digitalcommons.odu.edu/hms_fac_pubs/33

Original Publication Citation

Ridinger, L., & Funk, D. C. (2006). Looking at gender differences through the lens of sport spectators. *Sport Marketing Quarterly*, 15(3), 155-166.

Looking at Gender Differences Through the Lens of Sport Spectators

Lynn L. Ridinger and Daniel C. Funk

Abstract

This paper explores common assumptions about the intrinsic differences between male and female consumers within a subset of leisure consumption – sport spectating. This research utilized the Sports Interest Inventory (SII) (Funk, Mahony & Ridinger, 2002) to examine differences between spectators (N = 959) attending men's and women's basketball games at a NCAA Division I institution. MANOVA results revealed nine differences for Team-Gender, seven differences for Spectator-Gender, and three interaction effects. Multiple linear regression analyses revealed that three core interest factors (university pride, team interest, and vicarious achievement) explained a significant proportion of variance in commitment and attendance behavior for fans of both teams. However, a number of interest factors related to Team-Gender and Spectator-Gender emerged to differentially explain levels of commitment and behavior. The results indicate that while there are some commonalities that motivate people to attend college basketball games involving athletes of each gender, there are also differences that make women's basketball unique from men's basketball.

Looking at Gender Differences Through the Lens of Sport Spectators

The National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division I Women's Basketball Issues Committee was established in 2002 to examine issues surrounding the marketing and promotion of women's basketball (Lee,

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“Women's sports are caught in a “Catch-22” in terms of recognition, respect, and financial viability ... Many sport marketers, promoters, and corporate advertisers have treated fans of women's sports as second-class consumers ...”

2004b). Spurred by encouraging TV ratings for coverage of the 2004 Division I women's basketball tournament, the committee members believe that the time is right to capitalize on the growing interest in women's basketball. Recently, a series of focus groups were conducted and a survey was issued to coaches, administrators and marketing directors at NCAA institutions in all divisions. The purpose of these inquiries was to identify six or seven attributes unique to college women's basketball that could serve as the foundation for a new branding effort. According to Sue Donohoe, Vice President of Division I women's basketball at the NCAA, a branding platform will help solidify the game's identity and help the sport grow. Once the unique attributes have been identified, the committee plans to develop marketing materials that can be used by college coaches and administrators to communicate a more consistent message to constituents (Lee, 2004b).

One goal of the NCAA Division I Women's Basketball Issues Committee was to identify factors that are unique to women's college basketball (Lee, 2004B). Several questions come to mind in association with the notion that there are, in fact, factors that are unique to women's basketball. Is women's basketball a product unlike men's basketball? What attributes and benefits of the sport experience motivate fans to attend games? Do these motives differ for those who attend men's basketball games? Are there any differences in the motives of male and female fans? For college athletic programs, many with limited marketing dollars, can advertising and promotional campaigns for the men's teams and women's teams be combined or would they be more effective with distinct messages? What does research tell us about gender differences associated with sport spectatorship?

Within the last decade, a variety of studies on sport consumers have examined gender as one of several pos-

sible segmentation variables. A major limitation of these studies is that the sample was limited to college students (Bahk, 2000; Dietz-Uhler, End, Jacquemotte, Bentley, & Hurlbut, 2000; Dietz-Uhler, Harrick, End & Jacquemotte, 2000; Sargent, Zillmann, & Weaver, 1998; Wann, 1995; Wann, Schrader, & Wilson, 1999) or spectators that were surveyed within the context of a single gender team (male or female) as the object (Armstrong, 1999; Armstrong, 2001; Dixon, 2002; Funk, Mahony, & Ridinger, 2002; Funk, Ridinger & Moorman, 2003; Kerstetter & Kovich, 1997). Empirical evidence based on data obtained from both men's sports fans and women's sports fans is scant (Fink, Trail, & Anderson, 2002; James & Ridinger, 2002; Kahle, Duncan, Dalakas, & Aiken, 2001). The purpose of the present research is to extend our understanding of gender differences by responding to the following three questions: 1) Do different motives exist for consumers attending women's compared to men's college basketball games? 2) If so, do these motives differ by gender of the consumer? 3) Can unique attributes of women's basketball be identified to explain psychological and behavioral outcomes? This paper explores the intrinsic differences between men and women within a subset of leisure consumption – sport spectating. Specifically, this study focuses on college basketball fans.

“... recent branding efforts by the NCAA Division I Women's Basketball Issues Committee is based on the belief that there are unique attributes to the women's game ...”

Literature Review

Significant strides have been made over the past three decades in providing participation opportunities for girls and women in sport. Media visibility has increased for some female athletes such as Serena Williams, Annika Sorenstam, and Mia Hamm; however, women's sports leagues continue to struggle to attract media attention and a solid fan base (Bernstein, 2002; Bishop, 2003; Bruce, 1998; Hersh, 2003). The Women's National Basketball Association (WNBA) has not made a profit since its inaugural season in 1997 and is experiencing declining attendance and modest television ratings (Saslow, 2004). Despite the popularity of the 1999 Women's World Cup and the backing of several powerful media investors, the Women's United Soccer Association (WUSA) was forced to suspend operations after three seasons. The league has attempted to keep its brand alive through the staging of soccer festivals in preparation for a potential relaunch (Lee, 2004a). For women's college basketball, attendance figures are climbing (Campbell,

2003) and television ratings are improving (Lee, 2004b), but support for other women's sports at the collegiate level is marginal at best.

Women's sports are caught in a “Catch-22” in terms of recognition, respect, and financial viability (Nichols, Moynahan, Hall, & Taylor, 2002). Many sport marketers, promoters, and corporate advertisers have treated fans of women's sports as second-class consumers (Branch, 1995). WNBA executives assert that more fans would care about the league if the media took a greater interest whereas the media claims that it cannot justify devoting the inches and airtime to a sport that interests so few (Wertheim, 2004). More media attention is needed to attract sponsors and gain exposure, but women's sports are considered insignificant by the male-dominated sports media (Hersh, 2003). Ownership of men's professional sports franchises in North America by media/entertainment conglomerates is a strategy that is becoming increasingly important to compete for media market share (Harvey, Law, & Cantelon, 2001). According to Harvey et al. (2001), with media money behind franchise capitalization, less cashed franchises (e.g., small market teams and women's sports) will have a difficult time maintaining the fan support that keeps them alive. A symbiotic relationship exists between sport and mass media with sport organizations receiving publicity in the form of event coverage while the media receives programming and content (Nichols, Moynahan, Hall, & Taylor, 2002; Sage, 1990).

In addition to the challenges to gain recognition and media exposure, promoters of women's sports must sometimes deal with various assumptions made about female sport consumers and consumers of women's sports. From a marketing perspective, it can be very frustrating for sport leagues and teams when gender differences are painted in broad strokes and it is sometimes difficult to separate fact from fiction. The following section will examine a few commonly held beliefs associated with female fans and women's sports.

Women are not interested in sports – fact or fiction?

Female athletic participation has surged since the enactment of Title IX in 1972, with a tenfold growth in the number of female high school athletes (Title IX, 2003). At the college level, 44% of all NCAA Division I student-athletes are female (The NCAA News, 2004). Not only are more girls and women playing sports, but also they are more involved as sports spectators. Women comprise 47% of Major League Baseball fans, 46% of National Basketball Association fans, 43% of National Football League fans, 41% of National

Hockey League fans, 41% of NASCAR fans, and 49% of Major League Soccer fans (Adams, 2003).

Men are not interested in women's sports – fact or fiction?

According to ESPN, more than 70% of the viewing audience of Ladies Professional Golf Association (LPGA) events is male, approximately two-thirds of those watching the Women's NCAA Basketball Tournament are men, and about half of the viewers of televised WNBA games are men (Edry, 2001). Dads with daughters who play sports are some of the most avid supporters of women's sports (Lapchick, 2001; Lopiano, 1997).

“... men and women enjoy distinctly different types of sports ... males preferred watching combative sports on television whereas females were partial to stylistic sports.”

Female sports fans are different from male sports fans – fact or fiction?

There is a prevailing perception that male and female sports fans are different (Dietz-Uhler, End, et al., 2000) and that fans of women's sports are not the same demographically or psychographically as fans of men's sports (Lopiano, 2000). Much of the research on gender effects in sport has focused on differences based on the gender of the spectator rather than the gender of the athletes on the teams being observed.

According to Sargent, Zillmann, and Weaver (1998), men and women enjoy distinctly different types of sports. Their findings revealed that males preferred watching combative sports on television whereas females were partial to stylistic sports. Sport socialization research examines the impact that environmental forces have on children and individuals from two different perspectives: socialization into sport and socialization through sport (Eitzen & Sage 2003; James, 2001). This line of inquiry indicates that people are attracted to sport due to formal channels (i.e., parents, peers, coaches, mass media, teachers) and informal channels (i.e., school, church, and community-based programs) (Kenyon & McPherson, 1973; Spreitzer & Snyder, 1976). Funk and James (2001) further suggest that media plays a primary role for introducing new teams and sport leagues to adults.

Bruce (1998) traced the ways that institutional, social, and familial contexts shaped viewers' interpretations of sports broadcasts. One finding of this study suggested that women did not display strong loyalties to specific women's sports teams that are common with men and their favorite men's teams. This was attributed to the extensive sports information and media attention given to men's sports. In a study on

cognitive development and socialization in the initial development of team loyalty, it was found that children form preferences for sports teams early in life (James, 2001). Results of this study revealed and that the gender stereotype associating sports with males was prevalent among children and that fathers were the most influential socializing agent in introducing children to sports teams.

In a study on experiences and effects of viewing televised sports, Gantz and Wenner (1991) found differences based on gender for 9 of the 15 motivation items examined; however, these differences were not dramatic. Most notable among their findings, women were more likely to watch televised sports for companionship and sharing the experience with family and friends whereas men watched to unwind and become wrapped up in the excitement and drama of the game. Wann (1995) also found that women exhibited higher levels of motivation on the family subscale of the Sport Fan Motivation Scale (SFMS) while men were motivated more by eustress, self-esteem, escape, entertainment, and aesthetic factors. In a series of studies conducted by Wann, Schrader and Wilson (1999), men consistently scored higher on the eustress and self-esteem subscales of the SFMS while women scored higher on the family subscale in two of their three studies.

Bahk (2000) found that male college students tend to be more involved with sports as spectators than female students. Men invested more time in reading, listening, watching, and talking about sports and they were more likely to experience emotional fluctuations from watching sports. Similar findings were reported by Dietz-Uhler, Harrick, et al., (2000). Their results indicated that males were more likely to engage in traditional sport fan behavior and identified more strongly with being a fan. Nonetheless, an equal number of male and female college students considered themselves to be sport fans. Females reported being fans because they attended and watched sporting events with family and friends while males were more likely to consider themselves fans because they played sports and wanted to acquire sports information.

James and Ridinger's (2002) findings did not support the hypothesis that an equal number of males and females considered themselves to be fans. They found that more males reported being sports fans and females had a stronger connection to a specific team than to sport in general. Contrary to previous research, females did not rate the opportunity to spend time with family higher than males. In comparing fans of the women's team to fans of the men's team, the only significant difference found was aesthetics. The aesthetic appeal of women's basketball was rated higher than men's bas-

ketball, but only by female fans (James & Ridinger, 2002).

Fink, et al. (2002) analyzed both Spectator-Gender and Team-Gender in their examination of environmental factors associated with sport consumption behavior and attendance at college basketball games. Results revealed that spectators at women's games differed from those at men's games in their perceptions of pre-event influences (i.e., ticket prices, advertising, influence of family and friends), present behavior (i.e., merchandise purchases, wearing of team apparel, media consumption, tracking statistics), and future behavior (i.e., loyalty, attendance intentions, merchandise purchasing intentions). The significant differences found based on Spectator-Gender (5 of 12) were fewer than the differences based on Team-Gender (11 of 12). The authors suggested that marketing strategies should vary for different intercollegiate athletic events. Kahle et al. (2001) also concluded that fans of men's college basketball and fans of women's college basketball were not homogenous. Based on social values, they constitute two distinct markets.

Other studies have examined fans of women's sports, but these studies did not include comparisons to fans of men's sports or between male and female spectators at the event. The purposes of these studies were to explore factors associated with interest in women's soccer (Funk, et al., 2001; Funk, et al., 2002), consumer support or involvement with women's basketball (Funk et al., 2003; Funk, et al., 2004; Kerstetter & Kovich, 1999), and the interrelationships between socio-demographics, lifestyle, and consumption of women's professional basketball games (Zhang, et al., 2003).

Women's sports are different than men's sports – fact or fiction?

According to Donna Lopiano, Executive Director of the Women's Sports Foundation, "Men's and women's sports are two separate products appealing to different audiences, both consisting of male and female fans. Putting them together is a lot like selling Viagra with estrogen. Both are excellent products but you don't sell them to the same folks" (Lopiano, 2000, p.34). She goes on to point out that with women's sports, there is a premium on skill and focused effort whereas men's sports promote strength and violence. In comparing the WNBA to the NBA, Wertheim (2004) argued that the WNBA games are much more affordable and are great for kids because the players are easy to root for and will sign autographs. He also noted, "Those basketball purists – prone to bellyaching about the NBA's poverty of fundamentals, the indifference to defense and the yawn-inducing isolation game – would love

the way WNBA teams swing the ball and sacrifice non-vital organs for loose balls" (p. 2).

As noted earlier, recent branding efforts by the NCAA Division I Women's Basketball Issues Committee is based on the belief that there are unique attributes to the women's game (Lee, 2004b). The premise of this current study is to provide scientific evidence to either support or refute the aforementioned views that women's sports are indeed different than men's sports.

Specifically, this study examined whether different motives exist for consumers of women's vs. men's intercollegiate basketball at one NCAA Division I institution and what role gender plays in these differences.

"Fans of both teams strongly agreed that attending games was an enjoyable way to spend time with family and/or friends and that they came to the games to support the entire team."

Finally, these differences were used to identify motives related to team commitment and game attendance.

Measuring Spectator Motives

Research on sport spectators and fans has utilized a number of scales to assess the psychological motives related to attendance, media usage and interest at live sporting events. Wann (1995) was among the first to develop a comprehensive scale to measure eight factors observed to influence behavior: eustress, self-esteem, escape, entertainment, economic (gambling), aesthetic, group affiliation, and family. Trail and James (2001) later developed the Motivation Scale for Sport Consumption (MSSC) to examine ten aspects of spectator behavior: achievement, acquisition of knowledge, aesthetics, drama, escape, family, physical attraction, physical skills of players, and social interaction. McDonald, Milne and Hong (2002) utilized a scale to measure spectator and sport participant motives related to: risk-taking, stress reduction, aggression, affiliation, social facilitation, self-esteem, competition, achievement, skill mastery, aesthetics, value development, and self-actualisation.

Recent efforts have attempted to integrate this research into scales applicable for women's sporting events. Funk, et al., (2001) used prior studies on spectator motivation to develop the Sport Interest Inventory (SII) that measured ten specific motivational factors for an international women's sporting event: drama, vicarious achievement, aesthetics, team interest, player interest, sport interest, pride, excitement, social opportunities, and support for women's opportunities. Based on the emergence of factors from open-ended comments in the Funk, et al. (2001) study,

Funk, et al., (2002) extended the SII by incorporating four additional factors to examine women's sport spectators: players as role models, entertainment value (affordability), bonding with family, and wholesome environment. For a study of women's professional basketball fans (Funk, et al., 2003), the SII was augmented to 18 factors with the addition of four more factors that emerged from a series of focus groups: escape, bonding with friends, sport knowledge, and customer service. A confirmatory factor analysis and additional test of discriminant validity provided evidence to support the uniqueness of the 18 constructs.

Although the SII was developed and tested on consumers of women's sport, 14 of the 18 factors have been utilized in prior research to examine consumers of men's sport or sport in general (e.g., Funk, Ridinger, & Moorman, 2003; Gladden & Funk, 2002; Mahony, Nakazawa, Funk, James, & Gladden, 2002; Wann, 1995). The psychometric properties of the SII's have also been sequentially tested in three separate studies on consumers attending various women's sporting events: 1) the 1999 FIFA Women's World Cup (Funk et al., 2001), 2) the 1999 Nike U.S. Women's Soccer Cup (Funk et al., 2002), and 3) games of a WNBA team (Funk et al., 2003). Since the goal of this current research is to explore the intrinsic differences between men and women, the SII represents a diagnostic tool to assess how individuals who vary in levels of motiva-

“Content and marketing activity specifically targeted towards consumers of women's basketball teams should emphasize the social nature of attending games, spending quality time with significant others, the role model image of the players, and the notion of supporting opportunities for women.”

tional characteristics differ on criterion measures of concern (e.g., psychological commitment to the team, repeat attendance).

Methodology

This study explored the intrinsic differences between fans of women's college basketball and fans of men's college basketball at a single institution. A modified version of the Sport Interest Inventory (SII) (Funk, et al., 2002; 2003) was developed by selecting one question from each of the 15 dimensions that have been examined in multiple studies. See Appendix A for construct definitions and items. The selection of each question to represent a specific dimension has drawn recent support (e.g., Nagy, 2002) and was based upon a review of the SII wording and factor loadings reported by Funk et al., 2002; 2003. Three commitment items

previously used to examine the relationship between the SII factors and loyalty were incorporated. The resulting survey contained the 15 SII items, three commitment items and a battery of demographic, behavioral, and media usage items.

Data were collected over a two year period at one NCAA Division I university in the mid-Atlantic region. Survey distribution was done on-site at two women's basketball games and two men's basketball games during the 2002-2003 basketball season and for two women's basketball games and two men's basketball games during the 2003-2004 season. All of the games were against conference opponents and played toward the end of the basketball season. There were 150 surveys distributed at each selected game. Cluster random sampling was used to first select sections within the venue and then rows within the selected sections. Graduate students were trained to distribute the surveys and pencils to adult spectators at their seats prior to the start of the game and then collect the completed forms during halftime. Participation was voluntary so those who chose not to participate were replaced. It took respondents approximately 10 minutes to complete the questionnaire.

During the 2002-2003 basketball season, a sample of 300 spectators at the women's games and 300 spectators at the men's games received the survey. Of those returned by spectators at the women's game, 248 were usable for a response rate of 83%. For the men's game, 230 surveys were usable for a response rate of 77%. The same number of surveys were distributed the following season and results yielded a 81% response rate for those attending the women's games and 79% for those at the men's games. The combined data set included responses from 492 women's basketball spectators and 467 men's basketball spectators for an overall sample of 959 (80% response rate).

Analysis

Descriptive statistics were utilized to develop a general profile of spectator characteristics for each year of data collection. Chi-square and multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) were used to examine gender differences. Based upon the similar results across both seasons, the samples were combined for analyses. Chi square analysis was used to assess an array of demographic data. MANOVA was used to analyze Spectator-Gender and Team-Gender differences for the SII factors followed by analysis of variance (one-way) procedures where appropriate. Multiple linear regression was employed to examine the predictive validity of the SII factors in explaining attendance and commitment.

Table 1**MANOVA Results for Spectator-Gender and Team-Gender for SII Factors**

	Total Sample	Men's Team	Women's Team	Male Spectators	Female Spectators
SII Factors	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)
University Pride	3.77 (1.05)	3.69 (1.09)	3.84 (1.01)	3.68 (1.05)	3.87 [^] (1.04)
Drama	4.07 (.93)	4.04 (.94)	4.09 (.93)	4.07 (.92)	4.06 (.94)
Aesthetics	4.12 (.92)	3.95 (1.00)	4.27* (.80)	4.05 (.94)	4.19 (.88)
Affordability	4.05 (.97)	3.97 (.98)	4.12 (.96)	3.98 (.97)	4.14 [^] (.96)
Excitement	3.99 (.88)	3.82 (.92)	4.15* (.82)	3.92 (.87)	4.07 (.89)
Player Interest	2.35 (1.13)	2.29 (1.11)	2.41 (1.15)	2.32 (1.08)	2.39 (1.20)
Family/Friends	4.36 (.79)	4.28 (.82)	4.43* (.73)	4.29 (.80)	4.44 [^] (.75)
Team Interest	4.34 (.89)	4.26 (.97)	4.42* (.81)	4.29 (.91)	4.41 (.87)
Support Sport	3.81 (1.03)	3.51 (1.04)	4.10* (.94)	3.63 (1.05)	4.04 [^] (.97)
Wholesome Environment	3.98 (.84)	3.82 (.86)	4.14* (.80)	3.92 (.84)	4.06 (.84)
Escape	3.85 (1.01)	3.81 (1.05)	3.89 (.96)	3.77 (1.06)	3.95 (.93)
Socialization	3.71 (.94)	3.62 (.97)	3.80* (.91)	3.62 (.95)	3.83 [^] (.92)
Sport Interest	4.07 (.99)	4.05 (.99)	4.08 (.98)	4.07 (.96)	4.06 (1.01)
Role Model	3.57 (1.05)	3.28 (1.04)	3.85* (.98)	3.47 (1.07)	3.69 (1.01)
Vicarious Achievement	3.50 (1.08)	3.39 (1.10)	3.61* (1.05)	3.41 (1.09)	3.62 [^] (1.05)
* Team-Gender Difference $p < .05$ [^] Spectator-Gender Difference $p < .05$					

Results – Demographic Profiles

Demographic profiles comprising gender, age, ethnicity, education, income, and affiliation with the university were established for each fan base. There was a significant difference ($p < .01$) between the number of male and female consumers. Approximately two thirds (65%) of the respondents at the men's games were male and one third (35%) were female. Gender was more evenly split for respondents attending the women's games with 45% male and 55% female. There was a slightly older crowd at the women's game with 54% age 40 or older while only 42% were in this age range at the men's game. The ethnic composition of the audience at both the men's games and women's games was only slightly different. Most of the respondents were white (76% at the women's games, 68% at the men's games) or black (17% at the women's games, 23% at the men's games). All other reported ethnicities were 3% or less. There were no significant differences between the two fan bases on education or income levels. Differences were evident in regard to affiliation with the university. A greater percentage of the crowd at the men's games consisted of undergraduate students (35% at men's games, 24% at women's games) and alumni (19% at men's games, 11% at women's games). There were more graduate students (5.2% at women's games, 3.8% at men's games) and faculty (3.3% at women's games, 1.1% at men's games) at the women's games. Many of the fans had no formal affiliation with the school (41% at women's games, 32% at men's games).

Results – Comparison of Motivation Factors

The correlations among the 15 SII factors revealed low to moderate relationships ranging from $r = .02$ to $r = .52$. The MANOVA test revealed a Team-Gender difference for nine SII factors: aesthetics, excitement, family/friends, interest in team, support sport opportunities, wholesome environment, socialization, role model, and vicarious achievement $F(15,883) = 9.91$ $p < .01$. See Table 1. Spectators watching the women's basketball games were more likely to agree that their motivation for attending the games was based upon these nine interest factors than spectators attending the men's basketball game. For Spectator-Gender, the MANOVA test indicated a difference for seven factors: university pride, affordability, family/friends, support sport opportunities, escape, socialization, and vicarious achievement $F(15,883) = 2.58$ $p < .01$. Female spectators were more likely to agree than male spectators that these factors influenced their attendance at the games.

The above results were qualified by three Team-Gender X Spectator-Gender interactions for aesthetics, player interest, and support sport

opportunities $F(15,883) = 3.83$ $p < .01$. Female spectators attending the women's contests rated interest in the aesthetic element of the game such as the grace, skill, and athletic artistry higher than male spectators in attendance and all spectators at the men's contest. Male spectators at the women's game were more interested in a favorite player than female spectators. In contrast, female spectators attending the men's game indicated greater interest in a favorite player. Female spectators attending the women's contests were more likely to be interested in supporting women's opportunities in sport than their male counterparts and all spectators attending the men's games.

Results – Factors Predictive of Commitment and Attendance

Simultaneous regression was employed to examine the predictive ability of the 15 SII factors for the outcome variables of team commitment and game attendance based upon team gender. The mean response for level of commitment was 3.96 ($SD = .89$) on a 5-point Likert scale and the internal consistency measure was $\alpha = .83$. The mean response for game attendance was 3.04 ($SD = 1.05$, categories ranging from 1 = first game this basketball season to 5 = 11 games or more). The regression models are presented in Table 2 and indicate that for fans at the men's games, 62% ($R^2 = .62$) of the variance in commitment was explained by six of the 15 SII factors: university pride, team interest, vicarious achievement, excitement, sport interest, and escape ($F = 47.77$, $df = 15$, $p < .01$). For those at the women's games, eight of the SII factors explained 60% ($R^2 = .60$) of the variance in commitment: university pride, vicarious achievement, team interest, sport interest, socialization, support sport opportunities, family/friends, and escape ($F = 46.72$, $df = 15$, $p < .01$). The regression models revealed that for fans at the men's contest, 18% ($R^2 = .18$) of the variance in game attendance was explained by four of the 15 SII factors: university pride, team interest, excitement, and escape ($F = 7.51$, $df = 15$, $p < .01$). Finally, four of the SII factors explained 14% of the variance the women's game attendance: vicarious achievement, university pride, team interest, and role model ($F = 5.88$; $df = 15$, $p < .01$).

Discussion

The present research provides unique insight into individual differences among collegiate basketball consumers. A case study at one NCAA Division I institution was used to investigate recent assumptions made by the NCAA Division I Women's Basketball Issues Committee to brand women's basketball. Comparisons between spectators in attendance at

Table 2**Regression of Commitment and Attendance on SII Factors for Team-Gender**

	Men's Team Commitment	Women's Team Commitment	Men's Team Attendance	Women's Team Attendance
SII Factor	Beta	Beta	Beta	Beta
University Pride	.41*	.26*	.25*	.13*
Drama	.04	-.01	.01	-.01
Aesthetics	-.05	.05	.00	.04
Affordability	-.02	.07	-.01	-.04
Excitement	.08*	.03	.13*	-.07
Player Interest	.04	.00	-.06	.05
Family/Friends	.05	.08*	-.06	-.04
Team Interest	.30*	.17*	.16*	.12*
Support Sport	.05	.09*	.01	.02
Wholesome Environment	.05	.01	-.06	.04
Escape	-.07*	-.07*	-.15*	-.03
Socialization	-.08	.10*	-.03	.03
Sport Interest	.08*	.16*	.11	.10
Role Model	-.00	.03	.05	.13*
Vicarious Achievement	.19*	.19*	.11	.14*
F	47.77	46.72	7.51	5.88
Adjusted R2	.62	.60	.18	.14
* p < .05				

women's versus men's basketball games were conducted using the Sport Interest Inventory and revealed both similarities and differences. Unlike other instruments used to measure fan motives (e.g., McDonald, Milne & Hong, 2002; Train & James, 2001; Wann 1995), the SII contains four factors that emerged specifically from previous studies on fans of women's sports (i.e., support for sport opportunities, role model, wholesome atmosphere, and affordability). This was a chance to see if these factors were, in fact, unique to fans of women's college basketball or if they are also applicable to those interested in men's college basketball. This study contributes to the knowledge base on sport consumer behavior by examining gender from multiple perspectives. Comparisons were made based on the gender of

the athletes on each team and also by the gender of the spectators. The results provide empirical evidence to support the assertion that women's sports are, in some ways, unique from men's sports.

A Comparison of Motives – Fans of Women's Basketball vs. Fans of Men's Basketball

These data suggest that while some commonalities exist between fan bases, there are also several notable differences. Fans of both teams strongly agreed that attending games was an enjoyable way to spend time with family and/or friends and that they came to the games to support the entire team. Similar to other studies (e.g., Fink, et al., 2002; James & Ridinger, 2002; Kahle, et al., 2001) several significant differences based on Team-Gender were found. Spectators at the women's

games rated nine of the SII factors higher than spectators at the men's games. Fans of the women's team were attracted to a greater degree by the aesthetic quality of watching the players, the wholesome atmosphere and excitement surrounding games, the chance to spend time with family and/or friends and to interact with other fans at the game, the opportunity to support the team, the sense that the players were good role models, and because they gained a personal sense of accomplishment when the team won. Supporters of the men's team did not disagree with these factors, but did not agree as strongly with them as fans watching the women's team. One possible explanation for the fervor by fans of the women's team may be attributed to the historical success of the women's sports programs at this particular university and the fact that there were more basketball season ticket holders for the women's team than for the men's team during the time of this study. Albeit interesting, this fact limits the ability to generalize results of this study. Further research is needed to determine if these findings hold true for other Division I basketball programs.

A Comparison of Motives – Female Basketball Fans vs. Male Basketball Fans

Differences were observed for seven of the SII motives based on the gender of the spectator. Females rated all of these factors higher than their male counterparts. Women agreed more strongly that their attendance was a reflection of their pride for the university, the games were affordable and provided a good opportunity to interact with other fans as well as spend time with family and/or friends, the games were a good way to escape from daily routines, and they could achieve vicariously through the success of the team. The preference of women for the social aspects of sport consumption supports previous research (Dietz, Harrick, et al, 2000; Gantz & Wenner, 1991; Wann, 1995). Prior studies also found that men scored higher on subscales related to drama, excitement, and self-esteem (vicarious achievement); however, these findings were not supported by this current study. When communicating with female fans, both social and personal benefits could be part of the marketing message. The games provide a fun, affordable, and friendly outlet and the chance to gain a sense of accomplishment as you support the school and its athletes.

Interaction Effects

In terms of the interaction between Team-Gender and Spectator-Gender, there were three significant results. The aesthetic appeal of the sport was more attractive to female consumers of women's basketball. James and Ridinger (2002) found the same interaction effect in

their study on college basketball fans. This finding also supports Sargent, et al.'s (1998) assertion that women enjoy watching sports due to the grace and beauty of athletic movement. The second interaction effect was evident for interest in a specific player although the mean scores were all below neutral indicating lack of agreement with this factor. Nevertheless, female fans at the men's games were more likely than their male counterparts to attend games to watch a particular player while male fans at the women's games rated this factor higher than female fans. This may be attributed to physical attraction or sex appeal, a motive suggested by Howard and Madrigal (1994) that has not been included on most scales related to fan motives. Or perhaps male fans at the men's games and female fans at the women's games were more familiar with the entire roster and less inclined to be motivated by just one player. Professional sports teams utilize star power of favorite players to market their teams and attract fans, but the findings from this and other studies (Funk et al., 2002; 2003) indicate that going to games to watch a specific player has not been rated a major interest factor for most fans.

The final interaction effect involved support of sport opportunities. Female and male spectators attending the men's contest did not differ on their feelings about supporting opportunity for male athletes in men's sports; however, females at the women's games felt much more strongly than males at the women's games about the importance of supporting women's sports. Historically, men's sports have always received attention and support, but the same cannot be said about women's sports. Female fans may view their support of women's sport as a way to show gender solidarity because they can empathize with the disenfranchisement of women in other areas of society. Supporting the women's basketball team represents an avenue to promote equal rights for women. This is the type of marketing message that might resonate when targeting women's groups.

Unique Attributes of Women's Basketball

The purpose of the multiple regression analyses was to determine if any of the SII factors were predictive of team commitment and game attendance and to establish which, if any, of these factors were unique to fans of women's basketball. Although commitment and behavior are often combined to create an overall composite of loyalty (e.g., Funk & Pastore, 2000), the independent natures of these two constructs were examined to provide further insight into differences (e.g., Butcher, Sparks, & O'Callaghan, 2001). This perspective was supported by the disparity in the amount of variance explained for commitment ($R^2 = .62$ and

R2 = .60) compared to game attendance (R2 = .18 and R2 = .14). Hence, combining the two measures would have limited important distinctions in terms of marketing efforts designed to build long-term commitment versus a more spurious outcome of game attendance (e.g., Backman & Crompton, 1991).

In comparing fans of the women's team to fans of the men's team, several similar factors were observed contributing to the regression models for team commitment. The common factors associated with high levels of commitment were university pride, team interest, sport interest, and vicarious achievement. These factors should be incorporated into a combined marketing campaign to target or build highly committed fans (e.g., season ticket holders) across teams. In addition, escape was inversely related to commitment and indicated that spectators motivated to attend games as a diversion to the boredom of their lives displayed low levels of commitment. Thus, escaping from one's daily routine may be a marketing message that would attract new spectators who have not yet developed a commitment to the team. Some of these same factors also contributed to the regression models for attendance. The significant factors predictive of high attendance for both fan bases were university pride and team interest. A combined marketing strategy aimed at frequent users should integrate these themes.

The regression results were more revealing in regard to which of these motives might be considered unique to fans of the women's team. The factors associated with commitment and attendance that were unique to fans of the women's team included family/friends, socialization, support of women's sport opportunities, and role model. Previous research has found that women are interested in sport due to the social nature of enjoying time with family and friends (Gantz & Wenner, 1991; Wann, 1995). This study found this to be true not only for women, but also for men who were fans of the women's basketball team. In addition, support of sport opportunities and role model are two factors that have recently evolved from studies specific to women's sport (Funk et al., 2002; 2003; 2004) and have been largely ignored by other studies on sport consumers. Based on the results of this study, these are four factors that the NCAA Division I Women's Basketball Issues Committee could highlight in their efforts to develop a branding platform for women's intercollegiate basketball. Content and marketing activity specifically targeted towards consumers of women's basketball teams should emphasize the social nature of attending games, spending quality time with significant others, the role model image of the players, and the notion of supporting opportunities for women.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to extend our understanding of gender differences within a subset of leisure consumption – sport spectating. Results were based on data collected from college basketball fans at a single NCAA Division I institution and thus the ability to generalize is limited. Nevertheless, this study serves as a precursor for future research that will hopefully expand to include fans of college basketball at other schools and division levels as well as fans of other types of sports. Results of this study revealed that while some similarities exist between consumers of women's college basketball and consumers of men's college basketball, there are also some notable differences. In comparing fans of the women's team to fans of the men's team, significant differences were evident for nine of the fifteen motives measured by the SII. When comparisons were made based on the gender of the spectator, differences were found for seven of the SII motives. Finally, several unique attributes of women's college basketball were identified to explain psychological and behavioral outcomes.

As with all studies, there are some limitations to note. Due to restrictions placed by the Athletic Department on the length of the survey, the SII was modified to include only one item per factor. While each item was chosen based on the development of the scale in a series of prior studies, multiple item factors would have allowed for measures of internal consistency with this sample. Another limitation was that data were collected from basketball fans at only one NCAA Division I institution, thus limiting the ability to generalize to basketball fans other than at this particular school. Future research should include fans from a random sample of universities and could examine fans of other types of sports. Furthermore, a better understanding is needed of the factors that have emerged from studies on women's sports. In particular, support for women's sport opportunities and the role model image of athletes were two factors found to be important to female fans and fans of women's college basketball. Additional research in this area will help sport marketers to separate fact from fiction and build a stronger fan base for women's sport.

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Appendix A

Sport Interest Inventory Items and Definitions

Aesthetics - the extent to which interest is derived from the enjoyment of watching the grace, skill and artistry of athletic movement.

Affordability - the extent to which the affordability of the entertainment contributes to one's attendance at games.

Drama - the extent to which an individual is interested in going to games due to the drama and suspense of competition.

Escape - the extent to which interest in attendance derives from a desire to "get away" or be a part of something different from the "daily routine" of one's life.

Excitement - the extent to which an individual is attracted to the exciting atmosphere at games.

Family/Friends - the extent to which a game provides an opportunity to spend quality time with one's family and/or friends.

Player Interest - the extent to which an individual attends games to watch a specific player.

Role Model - the extent to which interest is due to the positive role model image of the players.

Social Interaction - the extent to which an individual is interested in attending games due to the opportunities to interact with other fans.

Sport Interest - the extent to which an individual is attracted to games due to his/her interest in the sport of basketball.

Support Men's/Women's Sport Opportunities - the extent to which interest in attending games is a reflection of one's support for men's or women's sport opportunities.

Team Interest - the extent to which an individual is a supporter of the entire team more than being a fan of one particular player.

University Pride - the extent to which an individual's attendance stems from their pride in the university.

Vicarious Achievement - the extent to which an individual is interested in going to games due to a heightened sense of self-esteem when the team wins.

Wholesome Atmosphere - the extent to which an individual is attracted to the games due to the wholesome fan-friendly environment.