EXPLORING THE BRAND IDENTITY CREATION OF FEMALE ATHLETES: THE

CASE OF JENNIE FINCH AND CAT OSTERMAN

A Dissertation

by

JAMI NICOLE LOBPRIES

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Chair of Committee,	Gregg Bennett
Committee Members,	George Cunningham
	Summer Odom
	Jon Welty/Peachy
Head of Department,	Richard Kreider

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ABSTRACT

In the context of human branding, athletes have become viable brands capable of providing empirical support for scholarly and industry endeavors. To add to our conceptual understanding of athlete branding and particularly in the context of female athletes, this qualitative case study investigated the brand identity creation and brand building strategies used by two female athletes, Jennie Finch and Cat Osterman, and their management teams to leverage their brand equity. Further, due to the gendered nature of sport, this case study assessed the perceived barriers female athletes face in the brand building process. Guided by brand identity theory and social role theory, interviews were conducted with Finch, Osterman, three female agents who manage female athletes' brands, and four softball players from various levels of the softball community. Findings from this case study provide empirical support for using brand identity theory to assess the creation of an athlete's brand identity and strategies for positioning, communicating, and leveraging the athlete's brand.

Themes shaping brand identity creation included identifying core values, brand personality, and brand associations. Brand building strategies included positioning the brand, communicating the brand's message, leveraging the brand's equity, creating a unique selling proposition (USP), and brand longevity. Additionally, barriers identified specific to female athletes' branding included an athlete's performance is only part of the package, ban bossy female athletes, lack of consistent visibility, lack of strong brand associations in women's sports, lack of assistance or guidance in managing a female

athlete's brand, and breaking barriers included strategies for overcoming barriers. A discussion examining the two cases of Finch and Osterman in the broader context of athlete branding is provided with support from extant literature on brand identity and branding literature. Finally, the academic and practitioner implications of this case study are provided as well as the limitations of this case study and suggestions for future research and practice.

DEDICATION

To my grandfather Richard M. Justinger.

I also want to dedicate this dissertation to the entire women's sports community.

A good friend once told me "there's a special place in heaven for women who help other

women." Without the help of passionate women in the sport community and their

willingness to help an over-enthused PhD student, this dissertation would not be

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides an introduction to the topic of study, brand identity creation for female athletes. Following the introduction to the topic, the research problem is provided. Then, I outline the purpose of this study, the theoretical background used to outline the study, and the rationale for exploring this topic. Next, I outline the research questions as well as the researcher paradigm which frames this research. The chapter concludes with an overview of the dissertation to outline what to expect in the following chapters.

Introduction

ESPN Films and espnW recently aired a documentary film series, *Nine for IX*, highlighting captivating stories of women in sports (Cingari, 2013). Carol Stiff, who helped spearhead the *Nine for IX* series, stated the film *Branded* earned the highest television ratings of the *Nine for IX* films (Carol Stiff, personal communication, February 10, 2014). *Branded* was produced by Heidi Ewing and Rachel Grady, and utilized Mary Lou Retton, Chrissy Everett, Anna Kournikova, Gabrielle Reece, and Lolo Jones among others as an avenue to explore the question of whether women's sports will ever parallel men's sports in athlete branding (Cingari, 2013). Their stories closely parallel some of the same issues facing female athletes and women's sports today. *Branded* addressed the sexualization of women's sports (see also Antil, Burton, & Robinson, 2012; Cunningham, Fink, & Kenix, 2008) and the discrepancies between

athlete endorsement earnings (Fink, Kane, & LaVoi, 2014; Grau, Roselli, & Taylor, 2007), both topics explored in extant sport management literature. However, *Branded* also highlighted branding the female athlete; a topic sport management scholars have yet to fully investigate.

Branding is a critically important business function for sport managers as it allows for the creation of effective marketing strategies and long-term financial benefits. The foundation of the branding process is the creation and management of a brand identity (Aaker, 1996). Rooted in identity theory (Stryker, 1987), a brand-based view of identity assumes the brand's identity represents its core values and ethos, and is what differentiates the brand from competitors (de Chernatony, 1999; Kapferer, 1997). Strategic brand management scholars posit that once a brand's identity is created, then appropriate branding strategies can be developed to leverage the brand's equity (Couvelaere & Richelieu 2005; Ghodeswar, 2008).

Originally, brand identity theories were used to examine corporate brands (de Chernatony, 1999). However, recent branding scholars have applied brand identity theories and branding constructs to human brands, and discussed how human branding research can produce empirical findings affecting business and scholarly endeavors (Thomson, 2006). Similar to corporate brand identity, the first step in personal or human branding is to establish a brand identity which differentiates individuals from others and then actively communicates and positions one's brand identity to a specific target market (Lair, Sullivan, & Cheney, 2005; Shepherd, 2005). According to brand identity theories in human branding, individuals construct brand identities which are authentic and

representative of their core values and attributes (Shepherd, 2005). Creating a personal brand identity allows individuals to then develop marketing strategies geared towards promoting and differentiating themselves in their given market.

Recently, sport management and marketing scholars have adopted a human branding perspective to examine athlete branding. The phenomenon of athlete branding is prevalent in the sport industry as athletes have become powerful brands in their own right (Ballouli & Hutchinson, 2012), but there appears to be a dearth of literature assessing athlete branding. Thus far, the majority of athlete branding research has focused on the interaction between athlete brands and consumers, and consumers' perceptions of the athlete's brand image (Arai, Ko, & Kaplanidou, 2013; Arai, Ko, & Ross, 2014; Carlson & Donavon, 2013). Few scholars have written about strategic brand building and the role of brand identity creation in athlete branding. Further, the majority of extant athlete branding research has focused on male athletes posing an even greater gap when discussing female athletes as brands and the brand building processes of female athletes.

To comprehend the branding experiences of female athletes, it is important to consider cultural influences which potentially influence the athletes' behavior, experiences, and perceptions of the brand building process. Sport management researchers suggest female athletes face a "continual negotiation of a dual identity" in sport (Kane, LaVoi, & Fink, 2013, p.274). According to social role theory (Eagly, 1987), this dual identity is based on society's expectations of gender roles and desirable behavioral tendencies for each gender (Eagly, 1987). The gender role expectations of

women, referred to as communal traits, are affectionate, helpful, interpersonally sensitive, and gentle, whereas men are believed to possess agentic traits of aggression, assertiveness, self-confidence, and self-sufficiency. Female athletes who do not adhere to hyper-feminine and hyper-heterosexual behaviors risk potential scrutiny, stigmatization, and negative consequences (Fink, Burton, Farrell, & Parker, 2012; Sartore & Cunningham, 2009), which could affect their personal brand. The characteristics deemed necessary for success for athletes (i.e., confidence and competitiveness) and personal branding (i.e., assertiveness in discussing one's self-worth), are often associated with men. Additionally, personal branding researchers cites potential gender-based limitations in regards to personal brand identity management (Fisher-Roffer, 2000; Lair et al., 2005).

Female athletes also face potential barriers in building their brand as the context of sport is often male-focused. Birrell (1987) suggests, "Sport is an essential ideological tool for producing and reproducing the domination of men over women" (p.482). This is often witnessed in the unparalleled media coverage and marketing opportunities between men's and women's sports (Fink et al., 2014; Shaw & Amis, 2001), as well as constant comparisons to the long-established standards of men's sports by society (Comte, Girard, & Starensier, 1989; McClung, 2001). In fact, female athletes receive less than 10% of sports coverage in television and print media (Messner & Cooky, 2010). Thus, when examining the personal brand identity creation of athletes, an athlete's gender could impact the athlete's ascribed self-meanings as well as the strategies and practices used to create a strong brand identity.

Statement of the Problem

By viewing athletes as brands, athlete branding scholars posit effective marketing strategies can be developed for athletes and their management. As mentioned, the majority of athlete branding scholars have focused on athlete brand image (e.g., Arai et al., 2013) and uses male athletes as the focal points of the examinations. While not negating the importance of an athlete's brand image, creating a strong brand image is the foundational step in building a brand (Aaker, 1996; de Chernatony, 1999). Before consumers can develop perceptions about a brand's image (Keller, 1993), brand owners must first clearly define and establish their own unique set of associations (de Chernatony, 1999; Ghodeswar, 2008). The internal components involved in building a brand identity demonstrate how brands become unique and different from competitors, what innovative communication strategies brands can use to break through the clutter, and how brands can deliver a consistent image to their desired target audiences (Ghodeswar, 2008). Sport management scholars claim establishing a strong brand identity is a viable branding strategy that can help athlete brands leverage their brand equity in the long-term (Arai et al., 2014).

Based on the lack of marketing opportunities for female athletes (Fink et al., 2014; Gray, 2012), some have suggested that female athletes must be, "more compliant to the options they get in terms of branding" (Branded, 2013). However, being compliant with brand relationships (e.g., endorsements) could be detrimental to an athlete's brand identity if the values of the endorsed brand do not align with the core values of the athlete's brand. Brand identity theory posits brand relationships should be developed

based on a brand's core values (de Chernatony, 1999). Brand relationships must be consistent with "the brand value, brand personality and other brand identity dimensions" (Ghodeswar, 2008, p.7). Thus, inconsistent brand messages communicated by female athletes and their management could hinder a female athlete's ability to create a strong brand identity. Skylar Diggins, a rookie in the Women's National Basketball Association (WNBA), and an athlete who has recently been very proactive in building her personal brand identity off the court, noted the importance of brand identity creation:

> Your brand is your prime possession… who you are down to the core. I want people to see me not just as a basketball player but as a person, as a woman…I want people to know that I'm excited about the sport I play but more excited about inspiring people and inspiring opportunities beyond basketball (Branded, 2013).

Additionally, the gender ideologies associated with sport could impact a female athlete's ability to present her brand identity to targeted audiences. Due to the nature of sport and society's view of sports as a male domain possessing masculine characteristics (Birrell, 1987), female athletes who do not adhere to hyper-feminine and hyper-heterosexual behaviors risk potential scrutiny and stigmatization (Sartore & Cunningham, 2009). Often, the combination of athletic success and sex appeal are part of the equation for successful female athlete brands whereas male athletes can build brands on athletic achievements alone. A cyclical problem exists for female athletes who receive criticism for building powerful brands based on untraditional gender roles. The

directors of "Branded" addressed the scrutiny female athletes claimed they have received:

> We found the women we interviewed seemed to face a lot more scrutiny in the public eye once they had sort of made it….in so many ways society has made them make a choice when it comes to their image….most of these women have to make the decision: "Vixen" or "girl next door" ("Branded", 2013).

Purpose of the Study

Utilizing a human branding perspective, the purpose of this investigation is to examine the brand identity creation practices and strategies of elite female athletes. Specifically, this qualitative case study (Stake, 2009) will utilize two female athletes, Jennie Finch and Cat Osterman, from a women's team sport to assess strategies used to create the athletes' brand identity and leverage their brand equity. Jennie Finch and Cat Osterman represent two of the most recognizable brands in the sport of softball. By viewing these female athletes as human brands and borrowing traditional brand identity theories (de Chernatony, 1999; Kapferer, 1997), I will examine the processes Jennie Finch and Cat Osterman have used to create a brand identity and the strategies they use to leverage their brand equity. Additionally, to provide multiple perspectives on the brand identity of Osterman and Finch and strategies for leveraging a female athlete's brand equity, interviews were conducted with current female agents and various members of the softball community. Drawing from literature on gender and sport, all interviewees in this case study were asked to discuss their perceptions of gender

differences in brand identity practices as well as barriers they perceive when creating their brand identity.

Theoretical Background

This case study utilizes brand identity theory to examine the creation of brand identity of Jennie Finch and Cat Osterman. According to strategic branding literature, the first step in successful brand-building is the creation of a clear and unique brand identity (Aaker, 1996). Brand identity is a wide concept which encompasses the branding constructs of brand positioning, brand culture, brand relationship, brand personality, and brand equity (Hampf & Lindberg-Repo, 2011). A brand's identity serves as a guideline for the evolvement of the brand over time (Kapferer, 1997). Kapferer and de Chernatony (1999) were among the first scholars to develop brand identity models designed to explain the development of brand identity. Though brand identity conceptualizations vary, scholars agree effective brand identities resonate with consumers, differentiate from competitors, and deliver a consistent promise over time (Aaker & Joachimsthaler, 2000).

De Chernatony (1999) argued for an internal focus on brand identity as the vision and culture of the brand builder considerably affect the brand-building process. Defined as the brand's unique set of associations, brand identity is comprised of a core and extended identity (Ghodeswar, 2008). The brand's core identity remains constant representing the brand's central attributes and characteristics, while extended identities are organized into meaningful groups focused on brand personality, relationship, and symbolic associations (Ghodeswar, 2008).

In order to understand the brand building process in competitive markets, I draw from Ghodeswar's (2008) PCDL model and a brand-based view of identity (de Chernatony, 1999; Kapferer, 1997). The PCDL model represents four key elements for building a brand identity: positioning the brand, communicating the brand message, delivering the brand performance, and leveraging brand equity. After strategic construction of the brand's identity and positioning the brand within the marketplace (Ghodeswar, 2008), appropriate brand strategies can be developed in order to leverage the brand's equity (Couvelaere & Richelieu, 2005; Gladden, Milne, & Sutton, 1998). Ultimately, brand equity allows the brand owner to measure the long-term value of the branding efforts used to create a brand (Hampf & Lindberg-Repo, 2011).

Rationale for the Study

The premise of this investigation is that female athletes can be viewed as human brands and traditional branding theories can advance our understanding of their personal brand building practices. Specifically, I applied brand identity theory to two female athlete brands because brand identity is the foundational element of a brand. Female athletes often have to navigate a dual identity as feminine and athlete while functioning in the male-dominated sport industry. Creating a distinctive brand identity could allow a female athlete the ability to create a preference in their specific marketplace (Ghodeswar, 2008). Further, a strong brand identity may allow female athletes to add value to their personal brand, command price premiums, and extend their value beyond their playing field. Due to the documented gender issues in sport (e.g., Fink et al., 2014;

Kane et al., 2013), creating a strong brand identity may serve as a strategy for overcoming barriers faced in women's sports.

Sometimes referred to as personal branding (Lair et al., 2005), the concept of human branding dates back to Kotler and Levy (1969), who claimed personal branding is an inescapable human activity and important for people seeking career advancement or public support. Thomson (2006) claimed celebrities should be viewed as brands due to their ability to be managed, the additional associations they possess, and the symbolic meanings fans attach to celebrities. Personal branding scholars and practitioners suggest every person is a brand regardless of position and regardless of the business (Peters, 1997; Shepherd, 2005).

Marketing and management scholars have begun applying traditional marketing concepts and branding theories to person or human brands in various contexts. For example, branding theories have been applied to human brands as fashion models (Parmentier, Fischer, & Reuber, 2012), university professors (Close, Moulard, & Monroe, 2011; Jillapalli & Wilcox, 2010; Zamudio, Wang, & Haruvy, 2013), and more recently, athletes (Arai et al., 2013; Arai et al., 2014; Carlson & Donavan, 2013; Parmentier & Fischer, 2012; Pegoraro & Jinnah, 2012). Being a nascent field, scholars have called for further examination into human brand management (Thomson, 2006), the personal branding process (Lair et al., 2005), and strategic athlete branding investigations using marketing theories (Aria et al., 2013).

Utilizing Thomson's (2006) human brand construct, an athlete brand is "a public persona of an individual athlete who has established their (sic) own symbolic meaning

and value using their (sic) name, face or other brand elements in the market" (Arai et al., 2014, p. 2). To date, this line of research in athlete branding is limited, consisting mostly of conceptual pieces (Arai et al., 2014), case studies of secondary data (Parmentier & Fischer, 2012; Pegoraro & Jinnah, 2012), consumer-based perspectives (Arai et al., 2013; Carlson & Donavan, 2013), and managerial perspectives on athlete branding in the digital space (Ballouli & Hutchinson, 2012). Parmentier and Fischer (2012) were among the first to specifically explore athlete brand building processes and the creation of athlete brand equity. However, the participants in the majority of these athlete branding inquiries are often male athletes signifying a paucity of research specifically exploring the female athlete as a brand.

Based on this gap in the literature and the issues related to gender in the sport context, this case study on the brand identity creation of Jennie Finch and Cat Osterman has the potential to expand literature on human and athlete branding as well as identify strategies for elite female athletes to potentially overcome some of the barriers women face in sport contexts. I departed from a consumer-based view of athlete branding and focuses internally on the brand identity creation of Jennie Finch and Cat Osterman.

Research Questions

This investigation will use the theoretical frameworks of brand identity (de Chernatony, 1999; Ghodeswar, 2008; Kapferer, 1997) and literature on gender in sport to assess the following research questions:

1. What are the current brand identity creation practices reported by elite female athletes and their management teams or agencies?

2. What are the current branding strategies being employed by elite female

   athletes and their management teams or agencies to build brand identity?

   a. How do these branding strategies help female athletes leverage their

      brand equity?

3. What perceived barriers exist for elite female athletes in regard to the

   creation of their brand identity?

Research Paradigm

Creswell (2012) stated, "Whether we are aware of it or not, we always bring

certain beliefs and philosophical assumptions to our research" (p. 15). These deeply

engrained beliefs and assumptions represent our paradigmatic assumptions which affect

the research problems we choose to study, the research questions we ask, and the

methods we employ to gather data. Kuhn (1996) defined a paradigm as a "model or

framework that shapes research problems and practices and provides guidelines,

expectations, and suggestions for researchers to pursue" (Quatman & Chelladurai, 2008,

p. 653). Our research paradigms represent the lens through which we view the world and

play a significant role in shaping our academic discourse (Costa, 2005).

In her Ziegler lecture, Frisby (2005) called for paradigmatic plurality in sport

management. Similarly, it is important for scholars in our field to have an understanding

and respect for each other's paradigms. This plurality and mutual respect can advance

the sport management discipline as alternative viewpoints and diverse methods applied

to sport phenomena will collectively build a more vigorous knowledge base of sports'

distinctiveness (Amis & Silk, 2005; Costa, 2005; Quatman & Chelladurai, 2008). In my

research on women's sports, it is important to acknowledge diverse research paradigms such as critical and feminist thought due to the historic nature of women's inequality in sport. Forty-one years ago, women were not afforded the same rights and access to sport as men, and therefore, we must account for history when working to advance women and girls in sport. While I acknowledge the history of women's underrepresentation in sport and respect critical research approaches, I approach research with an action-oriented mindset based on my personal experiences as a female athlete.

According to Lincoln, Lynham, and Guba (2011), our research paradigms guide our assumptions about the nature of reality (i.e., ontology) and our assumptions about how knowledge is constructed (i.e., epistemology). My epistemological orientation embraces an interpretivist paradigm where I view reality as being socially constructed and seek to understand certain phenomenon. Drawing from a pragmatist approach, I try to actively pursue solutions that will combat the problems in women's sports and then deliver this knowledge to the women's sport community (Patton, 1990; Rossman & Wilson, 1985). In this particular study, identifying the brand identity creation practices and personal branding strategies used by elite female athletes and their management teams offers an action-oriented approach to understanding how female athletes are advancing their status in the sport industry. Drawing from critical research approaches which identify the problems in women's sports (e.g., limited visibility and marketing opportunities for female athletes), I examined what current female athletes are doing to combat these problems. While building a strong personal brand is not the end-all solution for increasing women's full potential in sport, understanding appropriate

branding strategies can provide female athletes with potential solutions for overcoming some of the barriers female athletes face.

Utilizing a qualitative research approach, it is important to acknowledge myself as a human instrument in the data collection process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I have a background as a collegiate and professional female athlete and have personally experienced many of the problems documented in women's sport research (e.g., limited visibility and less earning potential than male athletes). Further, I witnessed many of the top female athletes in my sport (softball) get bypassed for endorsement deals and marketing opportunities. These were athletes who are the most accomplished in our sport. In conversations with these female athletes, they believed they were bypassed due to their physical appearance and due to the limited visibility female athletes receive at the professional level.

On an action-based side, I have personally taken advantage of my platform in my local community and used my athlete brand to create a personal business. Playing collegiately at Texas A&M has given me a platform and a recognizable brand in the College Station community. I have proactively used my personal brand to create career opportunities for myself and see the value in identifying my own unique identity and communicating that identity to a specific audience. Further, I have witnessed several former teammates and opponents build their personal brand through our sport and create career opportunities for themselves. Based on this, there is potential for female athletes to create personal brand strategies based on their identity as an athlete, even if those opportunities are not necessarily million-dollar endorsement deals.

Thus, the conception of this study as well as the research design underlines the deeply engrained beliefs I have as a person and scholar. Through this instrumental case study research design and action-oriented mindset, I hope to provide valuable insights for the women's sports community and advance our knowledge on sport management, sport marketing, and women's sport scholarship. However, based on my personal experiences, I recognize I bring potential biases to this research and did my best to mitigate these biases through a rigorous, systematic research approach.

Overview of the Dissertation

This dissertation is organized into five chapters. This chapter introduces the research topic, presents the theoretical background and relevant literature guiding the research, and provides the rationale for the study. Chapter II reviews the existing literature on branding, athlete branding, and gender in sport as it relates to the purpose and research questions addressed in this study. Chapter III provides the methodology, outlining the qualitative case study research design used to explore this topic of study. This chapter also contains information pertaining to participants, data collection, data analysis, and procedures for ensuring trustworthiness of the study. Chapter IV presents and discusses the findings. Chapter V, the last chapter, discusses the findings of this study, draws conclusions based on the findings, and identities potential limitations, implications, and directions for future research.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, I provide a succinct review of extant literature on the background of branding and the creation of brand identity. Then, the literature on human branding and the phenomenon of athlete branding are thoroughly discussed. Next, relevant literature on gender from management and sport management literature is reviewed to highlight the significance of brand identity creation for female athletes. Finally, a section on creating a brand identity for female athletes is provided with the research questions driving this study.

Branding

Background on Branding Theories

The phenomenon of branding in marketing theory and research discourse has continuously evolved since the early 18th century. Originally, branding can be traced back to marking of the skin and burning of logos on animals and slaves to identify ownership (Bastos & Levy, 2012). Despite branding's early roots, the concept of branding as a construct in marketing research did not emerge until the mid-twentieth century (Stern, 2006). Modern branding has been largely influenced by theorizing and research, and the role of branding in business contexts.

Existing branding theories arose from the needs for understanding the market and the development of society (Hampf & Lindberg-Repo, 2011). Historical perspectives on branding theory state the concepts of brand positioning (Ries & Trout, 1981), relational branding (Fournier, 1993; Gummesson, 2002), brand personality (Martineau, 1958),

brand identity (de Chernatony, 1999; Kapferer, 1997), and brand equity (Aaker, 1991; Keller, 1993; Simon & Sullivan, 1993) represent key milestones in the evolution of marketing theory, research and practice (Hampf & Lindberg-Repo, 2011). The theory behind positioning revolutionized branding as it changed the marketer's focus towards the target group and mind of the consumer (Ries & Trout, 1981). Relational branding developed through examining the role of branding within relationship theories and demonstrated the impact of brands on the relationships between consumers and companies (Gummesson, 2002). The concept of brand equity, coined in the early 1980s, embraces marketing's most important aspect which is measuring the value of a brand and long-term branding efforts (Hampf & Lindberg-Repo, 2011). There are three viewpoints for assessing brand equity: (a) the financial perspective; (b) the consumer-based perspective; and (c) the combination thereof.

What is a Brand?

Scholars claim a brand is more than a name, logo, or trademark; rather, it is a repository of meanings generated by sociocultural associations, consumers' interpretations, and marketers' intentions (Diamond, Sherry, Muniz, McGrath, Kozinets, & Borghini, 2009; Sherry, 2005). Brands are what people collectively say, feel, and think about your product, service, company, or self (Aaker, 1997). Brands encompass the tangible elements such as the name, logo, or image, as well as intangible elements such as identity, values, associations and personalities (Mercer, 2010; Schwarzkopf, 2008). Simeon (2006) defined a brand as being a consistent group of "characters,

images, or emotions that consumers recall or experience when they think of a specific symbol, product, service, organization or location" (p. 464).

A brand represents the promise the brand owner makes to the brand consumer (Aaker, 1991). A consistent promise built on coherence and continuity to the brand's products (Kapferer, 1997) helps establish strong personal and emotional relationships between brands and consumers (Aaker, 1997). Brands that develop these strong relationships with consumers can trigger high levels of trust and loyalty from their consumers (de Chernatony, 2001). In turn, high levels of trust and loyalty allow brands to increase their probability of brand choice and reduce susceptibility to competitors (Keller, 1993).

McCracken (1983) suggested the value of brands lies in the symbolic meanings consumers attach to brands. These symbolic meanings allow consumers to understand and express parts of their self. While these symbolic meanings can be derived from advertisement and marketing communications, they can also emerge from the interactions consumers have with the brand (de Chernatony, 1999). Managers of brands need an understanding of the meanings consumers attach to brands in order to make appropriate and strategic marketing decisions (Keller, 1993).

Brands help identify key attributes of the product or service while differentiating them from competitors and facilitating recommendations (Palumbo & Herbig, 2000). When branding creates this perceived difference from consumers, it leads to more loyal consumers which can translate to price premiums and greater financial profits (Kapferer, 2012). Rooney (1995) suggests a successful brand is able to, "attract and retain key

customers by promoting value, image, prestige, or lifestyle" (p. 48). These traditional concepts of a brand have been examined in various contexts such as sport.

Brands in Sport

In sport management literature, the focus on brands has been from the consumers' perceptions of brand image and brand differentiation (Gladden & Funk, 2002). Due to the nature of sports, some scholars argue the emotional responses sport teams and athletes generate from fans is stronger than other industries (Underwood, Bond, & Baer, 2001). Being that brands are loaded with symbolic meanings and associations that resonate with consumers (Ghodeswar, 2008); sport fans often attach their own symbolic meanings to sport brands. Utilizing social identity theory, Carlson and Donavan (2013) found consumers developed strong attachments with athlete brands they perceived as distinctive and prestigious.

Strong sport brands which generate this symbolic meaning and emotional attachment have the ability to nurture the loyalty of fans and create additional revenues through their brand (Mullin, Hardy, & Sutton, 2000). Couvelaere and Richelieu (2005) stated, "Strong sport brands are able to make consumers live the brand at different moments of their lives" (p. 25). Strong, relevant sport brands are able to transcend the sport context (Richelieu, 2004). For example, David Beckham is a global sport brand who may be more famous for his marriage to a Spice Girl and his Calvin Klein and H&M underwear ads than his play on the soccer field (Parmentier & Fischer, 2012). However, in order for a sport brand to be successful, there must be an element of athletic success on the field (Couvelaere & Richelieu, 2005). Mullin et al. (2000) suggested sport

brands have the ability to position themselves against immediate sport competitors as well as other entertainment competitors. Mullin and colleagues also suggested sport brands should ensure affordability and accessibility.

The majority of sport management literature has focused on the importance of brand image. For example, Arai et al. (2013) developed an athlete brand image scale utilizing Keller's (1993) customer-based brand equity scale. A brand image is based on consumers' perceptions of the associations consumers have with a brand (Aaker, 1997; Keller, 1993). However, before a consumer can perceive a brand's image, the brand identity must first be established by the brand owner and represent what the owner wants the brand to stand for (Aaker & Joachimsthaler, 2000). Aaker (1996) claimed developing a clear brand identity is the key to building a successful brand.

Creating a Brand Identity

Brand Identity Theory

Burke (1991) defines identity as "a set of meanings applied to the self in a social role or situation defining what it means to be who one is" (p. 837). Identity theory (Stryker, 1987), derived from a symbolic interactionist perspective and role-identity theory (McCall & Simmons, 1978), is rooted in the concept of roles and role identities. The role itself and the identity associated with that role comprise the two components necessary for role-identity (Petkus, 1996). According to identity theory, the multifaceted and dynamic self, mediates the relationship between social structures and individual behavior (Hogg, Terry, & White, 1995). Identities are formed through the process of identification (McCall & Simmons, 1966). Two types of identity encompass

identification: social identity and personal identity. While social identity is based on broad social categories, personal identity represents the unique set of meanings attached to the individual self (McCall & Simmons, 1966). Those meanings remain consistent through the various roles an individual occupies (Strets & Burke, 2000). Thus, one's personal identity requires the individual to define herself or himself based on social relationships.

Drawing from identity theory, branding is the process of creating an identity for your brand. The basis of branding is rooted in the creation of a personal and social identity presented in a way which belongs and differentiates from others (Bastos & Levy, 2012). Brand identity is defined as a brand's unique set of associations which resonate with consumers, differentiate the brand from competitors, and deliver the brand promise over an extended period of time (Aaker & Joachimsthaler, 2000). A brand identity is comprised of core attributes which remain constant over time, and an extended identity organized into clusters based on brand personality, relationship, and symbolic associations (Ghodeswar, 2008).

Brand identity theory encompasses the branding constructs of brand positioning, brand relationship, brand personality, and brand equity. Brand identity theory serves as a guideline for examining the evolvement of brands over time (Kapferer, 1997). According to de Chernatony, a brand's identity represents the values and ethos of the brand, it is what differentiates the brand, and it provides a sense of individuality for the brand. While a brand's image is what consumers perceive, a brand's identity is controlled by the brand owner (de Chernatony, 1999). Thus, de Chernatony argued for

research to utilize an internal brand identity approach to examine brand building processes.

Brand Identity Models

Branding literature suggests the most critical step in building a brand is to first create the brand identity (Aaker,1996). Several brand identity models have been used to help corporate brands develop their identity (e.g., Balmer & Stotvig, 1997; van Riel, 1995). Kapferer (1997) developed a brand-based view of identity utilizing a hexagonal prism model to understand fundamental differences between brands and their immediate competitors. Kapferer's model consisted of six central components of brand identity: physique, personality, culture, relationship, reflection, and self-image. Adapting from Kapferer's model, de Chernatony (1999) developed a brand identity model conceptualizing brand identity in terms of vision and culture. de Chernatony's model posits vision and culture as the driving forces of a brand's desired positioning, personality and ensuing relationships. Together, these elements of a brand's identity are presented to appeal to stakeholders.

This particular investigation draws from Ghodeswar's (2008) PCDL model for building a brand identity. Ghodeswar's brand identity model is based on four key elements essential for creating a brand identity: positioning the brand, communicating the brand message, delivering the brand performance, and leveraging brand equity.

Positioning the Brand

Defined as the brand's unique set of associations, the brand identity is comprised of a core and extended identity (Ghodeswar, 2008). The brand's core identity remains

constant representing the brand's central attributes and characteristics, while extended identities are organized into meaningful groups focused on brand personality, relationship, and symbolic associations (Ghodeswar, 2008). Positioning the brand represents the process of creating a perception of the brand in the mind of the consumer that differentiates the brand from competitors (Ghodeswar, 2008). This perception is created by actively communicating the brand's position and by clearly demonstrating its uniqueness and advantage over competing brands (Aaker, 1996).

Kapferer (1997) used a brand-based view of identity theory to develop a model for understanding how brands differentiate from competitors. Kapferer's model is comprised of six internal components involved in brand building: physique, personality, culture, relationship, reflection, and self-image. de Chernatony (1999) extended Kapferer's brand identity model and conceptualized brand identity in terms of brand vision and brand culture. Based on Schein (1984), a brand's culture is comprised of visible artifacts, core values, and basic assumptions. Packaged together, the brand's culture provides the brand a unique personality which differentiates it from others.

Communicating the Brand Message

Once the brand is positioned in the consumer's mind, the brand must create a vision and purposely communicate the brand's message to the target market (Ghodeswar, 2008). According to de Chernatony (1999), the brand's vision and culture drive the positioning, shape the brand's personality, and develop the brand's relationships. Brands develop a sense of direction by establishing a clear vision for the future, then communicate that vision to their target audience.

Communication objectives for the brand must resemble the brand's identity, differentiate the brand, and appeal to the target audience. Long-term communication strategies based on points of parity and points of differentiation help brands achieve competitive advantages (Keller, 1998). Communication strategies used to position brands include advertising campaigns, events, endorsements, sponsorships, public relations, and integrated branding communications (Ghodeswar, 2008). The key for brands is to keep communications strategies consistent with the brand identity the owner has strategically developed (Ghodeswar, 2008). Creative repetition and consistent value-based communication builds successful brands.

Delivering the Brand's Performance

After the brand's identity is positioned and message is communicated, the next element is delivering the brand's performance through appropriate brand strategies. The components of the brand's identity are eventually packaged and the brand is presented to "reflect stakeholders' actual and aspirational self-images" (de Chernatony, 1999, p. 166). In order to evaluate the brand's progress and brand strength, Ghodeswar (2008) suggests measuring the brand's performance through an on-going process. Progress can be measured through levels of purchase, brand recognition, brand recall, and brand awareness. Measuring the brand's performance allows marketers to assess the effectiveness of the brand building campaign (Ghodeswar, 2008). According to brand identity theory (de Chernatony, 1999), brand identities are influenced by their brand culture. The brand's culture and the underlying basic assumptions (Schein, 1985) about the culture a brand operates in can affect brand performance.

Leveraging the Brand's Equity

After strategic construction of the brand's identity and positioning the brand within the marketplace (Ghodeswar, 2008), appropriate brand strategies can be developed in order to leverage the brand's equity (Couvelaere & Richelieu, 2005; Gladden, Milne, & Sutton, 1998). Leveraging is the process which links the brand to another entity, creates additional associations for the brand, and helps generate brand equity, or attached value (Keller, 1998). Corporate brands often employ different strategies for leveraging their brand through line extensions, brand extensions, co-branding, and strategic alliances (Ghodeswar, 2008). Brand equity can be measured through a consumer-based perspective (Aaker, 1991; Keller, 1993) or a financial value perspective (Simon & Sullivan, 1993).

Brand equity is the added valued attached to a brand (Aaker, 1996). Parmentier and Fischer (2012) claimed the notion of brand equity development must be central to the discussion when discussing athlete brand management. Brand equity development in sport has been thoroughly examined though primarily through consumer-based perspectives in the contexts of sport teams (Couvelaere & Richelieu, 2005; Gladden & Funk, 2002; Gladden, Milne, & Sutton, 1998; Ross, 2006), but few scholars have examined brand equity development in the context of athlete brands (Parmentier & Fischer, 2012).

<center>**Human Branding Perspective**</center>

Background on Human Branding

Human branding is rooted the pursuit of career advancement through personal marketing and the promotion of one's self. The idea of personal marketing can be traced back to Kotler and Levy (1969), who suggested humans could be marketed similar to product brands when seeking employment or advancement in their careers. Kotler and Levy claimed, "Personal marketing is an endemic human activity, from the employee trying to impress his boss to the statesman trying to win the support of the public" (p. 12). Moving beyond personal marketing, personal branding is rooted in the 1990s economic globalization era where vast competition and rapidly-evolving technological advances required differentiation strategies for human brands (Lair et al., 2005). Personal branding was further popularized by Tom Peter's (1997) article entitled, "The Brand Called You" and Peter Montoya (n.d.). The personal branding phenomenon witnessed a large growth in the form of self-help books, business consultants, and online publications or services (Lair et al., 2005).

Human Brands

Typically, in marketing, the brand concept is applied to products and services, but more recently, marketing literature has begun examining the notion of people as brands. While sometimes referred to as person brands (Lair et al., 2005; Parmentier et al., 2012) or self-marketing (Shepherd, 2005), a human brand is defined as, "Any well-known persona who is the subject of marketing communications efforts" (Thomson, 2006, p. 104). Based on a human's unique associations and ability to be managed,

branding theories can be applied to human brands. Marketing and management literature has used branding theories to examine human brands in the context of fashion models (Parmentier, Fischer, & Reuber, 2012), university professors (Close, Moulard, & Monroe, 2011; Jillapalli & Wilcox, 2010; Zamudio, Wang, & Haruvy, 2013), and more recently, athletes (Arai, Ko, & Kaplanidou, 2013; Arai, Ko, & Ross, 2013; Carlson & Donavan, 2013; Parmentier & Fischer, 2012).

From athletes like LeBron James, to television personalities like Oprah, and even political figures running for office, organizations are committed to managing human brands in order to create strong emotional attachments between consumers and human brands (Edsall & Grimaldi, 2004; Thomson, 2006). Thomson (2006) suggests consumers identify more with human brands that are viewed as having more authentic personas. Thomson focused on the attachments consumers have with human brands and understanding why consumers develop such strong attachments to celebrities or other human brands. Carlson and Donavan (2013) extended Thomson's work to further examine why consumers psychologically identify with human brands. Understanding the emotional attachment consumers make with human brands can benefit teams' marketing efforts as well as benefit sponsors trying to select appropriate endorsers for their brands (Carlson & Donavan, 2013; Thomson, 2006).

Athletes as Human Brands

As mentioned previously, scholars have begun specifically examining athletes as human brands (Arai et al., 2013; Arai et al., 2014; Chadwick & Burton, 2008; Pegoraro & Jinnah, 2012). Athletes can be viewed as human brands based on their visible

platform and ability to be managed (Thomson, 2006). Arai et al. (2014) defined an athlete brand as, "a public persona of an individual athlete who has established their own symbolic meaning and value using their name, face or other brand elements in the market" (p. 2). Athletes' participation in sport, their visibility in the media, and advertisement messages portraying athletes create brand awareness for the athlete and their personal brand; however, the creation of brand equity for athletes is often built off the field (Chadwick & Burton, 2008; Milligan, 2009; Vincent et al., 2009).

It appears that athletes are becoming more proactive and strategic in developing personal brand strategies and leveraging their athlete brands off the field (Arai et al., 2013). Perhaps, one of the most notable athletes strategically building his brand is LeBron James, who has taken a hands-on, controlled approach to building his personal brand through various extensions such as strategic alliances with endorsers and corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives like the LeBron James Foundation (Faraoni, 2013). Strategic personal branding efforts are evidenced in the women's game as well. After retirement, golf legend Annika Sorenstam founded the ANNIKA brand which includes several extensions of her individual brand (e.g., the ANNIKA Academy, the ANNIKA apparel collection). WNBA rookie and former Notre Dame basketball star Skylar Diggins has taken advantage of a highly visible college career (which included three straight NCAA Final Four appearances) and is quickly becoming one of the most recognizable female athlete brands in sports. Beyond her endorsement deals with Nike and Sprint and signing to Jay-Z's Roc Nation athlete group, Diggins has been proactive in building her personal brand. Her documented strategies include being active on social

media, attending high profile events like the Super Bowl and the Grammys, and patenting her trademark headband (Feinberg, 2014).

Though athlete branding has been evident in the sport industry for decades (e.g., the Jordan Brand), athlete branding in sport management literature is limited. Athlete branding involves the, "interaction, reaction, and emotional experience fans feel when they engage with an athlete brand" (Ballouli & Hutchinson, 2012, p. 59). The majority of athlete branding literature revolves around consumers' perception of brand image (Arai et al., 2013; Arai et al., 2014; Carlson & Donavan, 2013), case studies on secondary analysis (Parmentier & Fischer, 2012; Pegoraro & Jinnah, 2012), and managerial perspective (Ballouli & Hutchinson, 2012). Further, athlete branding literature has mainly used male athletes as sources for examining the branding phenomenon.

Parmentier and Fischer (2012) examined specific brand building processes for athlete brands in an effort to understand the contributing factors for the brand equity development of athletes. The authors examined the dynamic processes of athlete brand building through an inductive analysis of two male, team-sport athletes: global soccer stars David Beckham and Ryan Giggs. By utilizing a case study approach to analyze the on-field and off-field brand building practices of these two athletes, Parmentier and Fischer identified two critical elements for creating an athlete's personal brand equity: professional image and mainstream media persona. As the authors noted, their study is limited based on their subjects being male athletes from one sport context. Thus, additional insights into the brand building process for athlete brands are warranted.

Ballouli and Hutchinson (2012) used a qualitative case study approach to explore athlete branding from a managerial and entrepreneurial perspective. The role of the marketing or brand management agencies can be critical to the construction and development of athlete brands. In today's sport industry, brand managers and agencies are often responsible for managing athlete brands and helping athletes with brand extension opportunities such as securing sponsorships, attending events, and booking appearances (Lipscomb & Titlebaum, 2001). However, in the sport management literature, very little is known about the role of sport management agencies and athlete brand managers.

Through an interview with digital brand entrepreneur Ashely De Walt, Ballouli and Hutchinson (2012) explored the methods athlete branding agencies are using to engage sport fans and elite athletes in the digital marketplace. De Walt claimed branding is important for athletes because fans want to be affiliated with athletes and follow news regarding athletes as much or more than the team. From De Walt's perspective, athletes have yet to realize their full potential of seizing branding opportunities through digital platforms such as social media and new technologies. De Walt claimed athletes are not capitalizing on opportunities to build their personal brands in the digital space partly because sport marketers and branding agents are not thinking strategically about how to use social media and new technologies to leverage athletes' brands (Ballouli & Hutchinson, 2012). De Walt suggests the increased face time (via social networking sites) can impact athletes' abilities to acquire endorsement deals as well as "other off-field endeavors" (Ballouli & Hutchinson, 2012, p. 61).

Pegoraro and Jinnah (2012) investigated athlete branding via the social media platform Twitter. Social media platforms provide fans unparalleled access to athletes and provide athletes an opportunity to create and control their brand. The authors used a case study approach to examine social media strategies of some of the top athlete brands on social media: retired basketball player Shaquille O'Neal, hockey player Paul Bissonnette, former football player Chad Ochocinco, and the President of the Ultimate Fighting Championship (UFC) Dana White. After analyzing these athletes' Twitter accounts, Pegoraro and Jinnah identified social media branding strategies for professional athletes to build their social media brand equity: provide followers with glimpses of their everyday lives, use social media to create personas which differentiate themselves, and use social media to connect with fans and fellow athletes. By building their social media brand equity, athletes have the ability to attract sponsors who are looking to tap into their large following and influence (Pegoraro & Jinnah, 2012).

Through a comprehensive literature review on branding and endorser effectiveness, Arai et al. (2014) proposed a conceptual model of an athlete's brand image. Utilizing Keller's (1993) customer-based brand equity scale, the authors identified three first-order themes of an athlete's brand image: athlete performance, attractive appearance, and marketable lifestyle. Within those three themes are 10 sub-dimensions: athletic expertise, competition style, sportsmanship, rivalry, physical attractiveness, symbol, body fitness, life story, role model, and relationship effort. Considering the framework is based on consumer-based brand equity, the idea behind this model is to consider the salient brand dimensions of athletes that influence consumer

behavior (Arai et al., 2013; Keller, 1993). The authors suggest identifying an athlete's brand image will assist sport marketers and agents in building athletes' brands. Arai et al. (2013) used 17 athletes to verify their athlete brand image scale, but only three of the athletes they selected were female athletes (Maria Sharapova, Danica Patrick and Serena Williams).

Impact of Gender on Athlete Branding

Within the sport context, women have faced greater barriers than male athletes in regards to building and leveraging their athlete brand. For example, the lack of consistent visibility for women's sports hinders female athlete's ability to increase their brand awareness to mainstream audiences. Additionally, this lack of coverage and the media's biases towards men's sports and male athletes can create a perception that female athletes are not as valued and therefore not as equitable as male athlete brands (Parmentier & Fischer, 2012). According to Kanter (1977), lower levels of resource access (media coverage) and status (or power) create organizational hierarchy and barriers for career advancement (e.g., the glass ceiling). In the context of female athlete branding, where resources and status are needed to enhance an athlete's brand, these barriers and potential glass ceiling could affect the strategies female athletes use in building their personal brand. In order to address these barriers, this study draws from social role theory in the contexts of sports and personal branding.

Social Role Theory

Identity theory (Stryker, 1987) posits that the self is a social construct reflecting the various roles a person occupies. Therefore, the self is a collection of identities that

reflects the roles individuals occupy in society. These roles that individuals occupy are defined by a set of expectations and imply certain role-appropriate behaviors (Callero, 1985). According to Callero, engaging in these behaviors validates one's status as a role member. In the context of female athletes, these roles include the appropriateness for behaviors associated with being a woman and being an athlete. Social role theory offers a guide to better understand these roles and behavioral expectations associated with the roles of female athletes.

Social role theory explains the desirable qualities and behavioral tendencies for each gender (Eagly, 1987) as well as "expectations regarding the roles men and women should occupy" (Burton & Welty Peachey, 2009, p. 248). Behavioral gender differences arise from the differential social roles were historically assigned in the division of labor (Eagly, Wood, & Diekman, 2000). Based on physical attributes, men were expected to fulfill tasks which required masculine roles that reflect agentic qualities and women were expected to fulfill tasks which required feminine roles that reflect communal qualities (Wood & Eagly, 2002). The communal characteristics of affectionate, gentle, helpful, interpersonally sensitive, kind, nurturing, and sympathetic are often ascribed to women, while the agentic characteristics of aggression, strength, self-confidence, and self-sufficiency are often ascribed to men (Eagly, 1987).

In sport management literature, social role theory has been used to explain the gendered roles of leadership behavior in athletic administration (Burton & Welty Peachey, 2009; Welty Peachey & Burton, 2011) as well as the gendered appropriateness of female and male athletes (Harrison & Lynch, 2005). Leaders are perceived as needing

more agentic characteristics as opposed to communal, which causes barriers for female leaders who exude more "masculine" traits in order to be successful (Eagly & Karau, 2002). Researchers have shown evidence that female athletes experience conflict when navigating their dual identities as both athlete and woman (Krane, Choi, Baird, Aimar, & Kauer, 2004). In both contexts, leadership and sport participation, women who did not adhere to their defined gendered norms faced gender-role stereotyping and negative consequences for their agentic behaviors.

Gendered Nature of Sport

Drawing from a social role perspective, social role expectations are problematic for female athletes who must exhibit agentic characteristics such as aggression, competitiveness, and self-confidence in order to be successful in their sport. Messner (1988) argues female athletes face a contested terrain between society's pressure to be feminine and the masculine characteristics of athletic performance. According to Messner, female athletes' quest for equality and self-definition in sport challenges the ideological basis of sports as a male domain. Evidence shows sport participation influences female athletes' perceptions of gender roles as well as society's stereotypes or judgments of female athletes to a point where "female athletes often struggle to reconcile their identity as women and athletes" (Harrison & Lynch, 2005, p. 229).

Elite female athletes are facing this same contested terrain over two decades later as sport remains an institution controlled by men and masculinity (Fink et al., 2014). This is witnessed in the comments made by the directors of *Branded* who claimed the female athletes they interviewed felt they had to make a choice when it came to their

image based on society's perceptions of gendered roles. The roles the directors described as "vixen" or "girl-next-door" align with the communal qualities ascribed to women and the expectations of these female athletes to portray feminine images. According to the female athletes interviewed in *Branded*, if they did not adhere to either of these images, then they were scrutinized or faced negative consequences which pose barriers to building a viable brand.

One of the most powerful institutions within sport is the media as it greatly influences society's view of what is important. A considerable number of authors have demonstrated how sports media has reproduced gender ideologies and dominant beliefs (e.g., Kane & Maxwell, 2011; Messner, 2002). The media has continuously positioned sports as a male domain where women's athletic achievements are trivialized, marginalized, or ignored (Kane et al., 2013; Messner, 2002). The underrepresentation of female athletes in the media (Kim, Sagas, & Walker, 2010; Messner & Cooky, 2010) as well as the tendency to promote female athlete's physical attractiveness rather than athletic skill diminishes the power of female athletes in sport and society (Kane et al., 2013; Lynn, Hardin, & Walsdor, 2004). In turn, this limits female athletes' ability to "define themselves in ways that fundamentally alter men's ideological and institution control of sport" (p. 293).The struggle to define themselves in this contested terrain could hinder a female athlete's brand identity creation.

In agreement with social role theory, female athletes and those promoting female athletes appear to accept the notion that highlighting hyper-feminine and hyper-sexualized qualities is necessary to be considered marketable (Fink, 2012; Kane et al.,

2013). However, researchers discovered sex does not sell women's sports (Fink, 2012).

Rather, as witnessed in the 2011 Women's World Cup, sports fans are attracted to

women's sports due to the athletic competence of female athletes and riveting games

(Novy-Williams, 2011). Youth consumers, a large target market for female athletes,

have been found to value a female athlete's skill over her femininity and sexual

orientation (Fink, 2012) which could reflect societal values overall. Thus, it is important

for female athletes and their management to understand what consumers value in order

to build effective brand strategies targeting their audience.

Gender Roles in Branding

Often, the success of branding efforts is based on measuring the long-term value

of a brand (Simon & Sullivan, 1993). For female athletes, long-term benefits from

branding could be dependent upon a female athlete's ability to promote her own unique

associations, differentiate from competitors, and assertively discuss her personal brand

value. The term self-promotion has been defined as, "pointing with one's

accomplishments, speaking directly about one's strengths and talents, and making

internal rather than external attributions for achievements" (Rudman, 1998, p. 629).

Gender differences exist in career settings when women are forced to discuss their

individual worth and estimate their abilities in order to advance their careers (Daubman,

Heatherington, & Ahn, 1992; Heatherington, Burns, & Gustafson, 1998). This aligns

with social role theory in that being assertive about one's worth and speaking directly of

one's self would be considered as agentic characteristics ascribed to males (Eagly,

1987).

Babcock and Laschever (2003) stated employees must assertively voice their personal strengths and desires to pursue promotion in their workplace. However, women are known to be more modest about their personal success and tend to underestimate the talents and abilities they possess (Daubman et al., 1992; Heatherington et al, 1998). Further, women are reluctant to self-promote themselves because of low self-esteem (Kacmar & Carlson, 1994), and for fear of being regarded as unfeminine, pushy, and domineering (Janoff-Bulman & Wade, 1996). Women who self-promote may be seen as having the masculine characteristics of dominance and arrogance; thereby, defying traditional gender norms (Hoeber, 2003; Rudman, Phelan, Moss-Racusin, & Nauts, 2010). This fear of violating societal norms of femininity warrants risk for social scrutiny and leads to missed opportunities for women to effectively promote themselves in the professional world. For female athletes proactively building their brand, they must voice their brand's strengths and value in order to attract sponsors and create opportunities for extending their brand beyond their sport. If women are constrained by traditional notions of femininity in regards to self-promotion or other components of professional advancement, then empirical research into this phenomenon could shed more light on barriers facing women and, more importantly, strategies for overcoming these barriers.

Based on the lack of visibility female athletes receive, the gendered social roles and behaviors expected of female athletes, and the potential scrutiny and risks female athletes receive for violating these gender norms, the role of gender could be critical in the brand identity creation of female athletes.

Creating a Brand Identity for Female Athletes

Based on brand identity theory (de Chernatony, 1999), athletes have the potential to identify their own unique associations, personality, and relationships. Appropriate management of an athlete's brand identity allows an athlete to build the foundation of her or his brand and position one's brand to the appropriate target audience (Ghodeswar, 2008). While an athlete's style of play and athletic performance helps create awareness for one's brand identity, off-field endeavors and communication strategies help leverage their brand equity (Milligan, 2009; Vincent et al., 2009). Carefully constructed and communicated brand strategies can enhance a sport brand's financial sustainability and create brand equity.

Identifying and implementing strategic marketing strategies allows both athletes and their management opportunities to proactively seek sponsorship opportunities (Arai et al., 2014), and leverage their athlete brand through personal brand extensions (e.g., sport-specific clinics), co-branding opportunities (e.g., endorsements), and strategic alliances (e.g., social causes or charitable foundations). In an age of social media and digital technologies, affordable opportunities exist for athletes to control their personal brand and strategically project their personal brand identities through extensions such as personal websites, blogs, and social networking sites (Labrecque, Markos, & Milne, 2011). Using appropriate strategies specific to one's brand identity enables athletes to create brand equity via social media platforms like Twitter (Pegoraro & Jinnah, 2012).

Though athletes themselves are being proactive in building their brand identity, often athletes receive help from their management teams or agents in managing their

personal brands and creating purposeful branding strategies to build their brand identity (Ballouli & Hutchinson, 2012). It used to be that an agent's role was to help athletes with their playing contracts, but through the commercialization of sports, agents now play a critical role in managing athletes' brands and helping them secure off-field marketing opportunities. Olympic sprinter Lolo Jones credited her sponsorship opportunities to having a brand manager versus her sex appeal or physical attractiveness (Fagan, 2012). Jones claimed her manager helped craft purposeful branding strategies to attract sponsors which fit with Jones's brand. However, the price of an agent or brand manager is expensive and the majority of female athletes probably do not make enough from their playing salaries to afford the help of managers. If female athletes are not receiving help from agents or managers, then it becomes even more necessary for the athlete herself to understand her brand identity and develop strategies specific to her brand and targeted audience.

Parmentier et al. (2012) claimed the concepts for product branding are "sufficient for understanding how people can position themselves to be successful in any career pursuit" (p. 373). However, a paucity of scholastic inquiry has investigated the person branding processes to understand how humans can strategically build their brand identities and position themselves in the market place. By viewing female athletes as human brands, scholars and sport managers can begin to develop brand building strategies specific to female athletes. Athlete branding expert Ashley De Walt stated it is about time sport marketers and brand managers "step in and help guide the athlete in creating his/her brand" (Ballouli & Hutchinson, 2012, p .61). Utilizing a brand identity

lens, understanding what practices and branding strategies current elite female athletes

and their managers are using will provide valuable information for practical and

scholarly endeavors.

RQ 1: What are the current brand identity creation practices reported by

elite female athletes and their management teams or agencies?

RQ 2: What are the current branding strategies being employed by elite

female athletes and their management teams or agencies to build their

brand identity?

a. **How do these branding strategies help female athletes leverage their**

brand equity?

The notion of gender must be addressed as a potential hindrance in the brand

building processes of female athletes. Gender differences exist in career settings when

women are forced to discuss their individual worth and estimate their abilities in order to

advance their careers (Daubman et al., 1992; Heatherington et al, 1998). To build a

personal brand identity, it is necessary for female athletes to identify their individual

strengths and communicate their strengths in order to build their personal brand.

According to social role theory (Eagly, 1987), this violates society's expectations of the

gender norms for women. Traditionally, gender norms suggest women are more

comfortable promoting or speaking on behalf of others rather than promoting their own

strengths, talents, and internal attributions (Moss-Racusin & Rudman, 2010). This is

problematic if the personal branding process requires individuals to sell or promote their

individual selves (Shepherd, 2005). Thus, if part of the athlete branding process requires

the athlete to take a proactive approach in highlighting one's individual value and voicing his or her brand's strengths and uniqueness, then these inherent gender characteristics could hinder a female athlete's ability to build her brand identity. Understanding female athletes' perceptions about gender differences and the potential barriers they perceive in the brand building process will further assist practitioners, athletes, and scholars in developing strategies for overcoming those barriers.

RQ 3: What perceived barriers exist for elite female athletes in regard to the creation of their brand identity?

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, I provide an overview of the research design and justification for using a qualitative case study approach to address the research questions. Then, a description of the research participants and the procedures for gaining access to the research participants are described. Next, the data collection methods and data analysis used in this case study are explained. Finally, following Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria, the guidelines for ensuring trustworthiness and credibility are provided.

Research Design

A research design operates as a map for carrying out the research investigation (Berg, 2001). To address the purpose statement and answer the given research questions, I utilized a qualitative case study research design to thoroughly examine the brand identity creation and branding strategies used by Jennie Finch and Cat Osterman, and their management teams. According to Stake (2005), case study designs allow researchers to draw, "attention to the question of what specifically can be learned about the single case" (p. 443). Abercrombie, Hill, and Turner (1984) claimed a case study can "be useful in the preliminary stages of an investigation" as it provides a single example of a certain phenomena (p. 34). For this particular study, the investigation of the brand identity creation of Jennie Finch and Cat Osterman's brands will provide preliminary information for future investigations of female athlete's brand identity creation.

Based on the purpose of exploring female athletes' brand identity creation, I utilized an instrumental case study approach to examine how Jennie Finch and Cat

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Osterman have created their brand identities. Further, to provide multiple perspectives on the brand identities of Finch and Osterman, as well as multiple perspectives on the perceived barriers female athletes face in the brand building process, additional interviews were conducted with three female agents and four additional softball players. According to Stake (2005), the intent of instrumental case studies is to gain insight into a particular phenomenon. Instrumental case studies look at the case in-depth and use the singular case as a supportive role in understanding the larger context (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Whereas intrinsic case studies have limited transferability, an instrumental case study approach allows the researcher to gather information that provides deeper insight beyond the case itself and into the overall context of female athlete branding (Stake, 2005). Stake suggests case study approaches allow the researcher to illuminate the stories of individuals living the case. Case study methods allow researcher to understand real-life phenomenon in depth (Yin, 2008). According to Yin, case study research begins by a thorough review of the literature and the creation of thoughtful research questions. This approach utilizes a systematic process for gathering information which allows researchers deeper insight into the topic under investigation (Berg, 2001; Singer & Cunningham, 2012).

Due to the limited knowledge on brand identity creation for female athletes as well as the potential barriers impeding female athletes' brand building processes, this case study approach operates as an important starting point for future studies on this topic. Rather than attempting to generalize or build theory, the goal of this instrumental case study is to understand the "case within its own world" (Stake, 2005, p. 450) and to

develop a better understanding of female athlete branding as a whole. By using the single case of the Jennie Finch and Cat Osterman brands, implications will be drawn to use in future research on athlete branding.

Background of the Study

According to Corbin and Strauss (2008), there are four sources of problems in qualitative research. One source indicated by the authors is personal and professional experience as sources of inquiry which, "leads to the judgment that some feature of the profession or its practice is less than effective, efficient, humane, or equitable" (p. 23). Corbin and Strauss (2008) suggest quality research pertaining to the researcher's personal and professional experience can create possible change to the situation. For instance, my experience as a college and professional female athlete greatly influenced my interest in researching the topic of female athlete branding and my goal of helping bring change to grow the women's sport community.

<div align="center">

The Cases: Jennie Finch and Cat Osterman

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In order to provide a thorough description of the process of brand identity creation for female athletes, purposeful sampling was used to select two female athletes who could provide first-hand experiences on defining a female athletes' brand identity, strategies for building their brand identity, and perspectives on potential barriers for female athletes in the brand building process. The two cases for this study are two of softball's most recognizable players and brands: Jennie Finch and Cat Osterman. These two female athletes were chosen as the main focus of this study because each woman has had a very successful athletic career and each has leveraged their athletic success off the

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field in very different ways. Finch and Osterman have a similar sport platform in that they are both softball pitchers, both were National Player of the Year, both played in the 2004 and 2008 Olympics, and both played professionally in the National Pro Fastpitch (NPF). By using two elite female athletes as cases, they are able to provide valuable insight into the athlete branding phenomenon as (a) they are the ones experiencing the athlete branding phenomenon; (b) as athletes, they are the brand owners in charge of creating their personal brand identity; and (c) as female athletes they can provide their perspectives on perceived barriers and gender-related issues. For a background on Finch and Osterman and an idea of their following from fans, see Appendix B.

Participants and Procedures

To help provide an industry perspective on this case, I utilized the perspectives of three female agents who currently represent elite female athletes to gain their perspectives on the brand building process of female athletes. Female agents of female athletes were chosen because (a) agents are often in charge of managing athletes' brands; (b) agents offer a unique industry-based perspective on the issues surrounding the brand identity creation of female athletes; and (c) as females themselves, the agents may experience their own barriers when helping female athletes build their brand identity. The agents range in the sport management agencies they work for, the clients they represent, their own personal backgrounds, and the amount of time they have spent representing female athletes. Further, the agents have varied backgrounds in representing team-sport athletes, individual-sport athletes, action-sport athletes, and two have also represented male athletes in the past. Agent 1 started her own athlete branding company

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and represents action-sport female athletes. Agent 2 works for one of the largest men and women's sport agencies and represents some of the largest brands in the WNBA. She has represented both male and female athletes in the past. Agent 3 is Jennie Finch's agent. She too has represented both male and female athletes including other softball players.

Furthermore, I collected data on the brand identity creation process of female athletes from four members of the softball community. These athletes were chosen to provide their perspectives on the brand identities of Jennie Finch and Cat Osterman as well as the perceived barriers for female athletes in the brand building process. Participants were selected based on their knowledge of the sport, knowledge of the athlete, and their knowledge on the topic of athlete branding. The participants ranged in their age, their familiarity with Jennie Finch and Cat Osterman, as well as their background in softball. All participants agreed to use their names in the case study. Cassie , who just graduated from Texas A&M University, is a current teammate of Osterman and has been coached by Osterman at a softball clinic. Taylor is a former University of Texas and current Team USA softball player. Danielle is current head softball coach at the University of Redlands, a former college and professional player, and a former NPF teammate of Cat Osterman. Lauren is an Olympic, professional, and college softball player who was a teammate of both Jennie Finch and Cat Osterman. For more information on the agent and athlete interviewees, see Appendix C.

Gaining Access

As members of an elite population (e.g., celebrities), the cases of this study,

Finch and Osterman, as well as the female agents, are not easily accessible through

normal means (Singer, 2005). Thus, multiple methods of sampling were utilized to

access and select participants who are currently experiencing the phenomenon of female

athlete branding. Purposive sampling techniques (Berg, 2001; Creswell, 2012) were

utilized to select research participants. As a form of purposeful sampling, criterion

sampling provides sampling guidelines for evaluating and selecting participants (Patton,

2002). Based upon Patton's criterion sampling guidelines, elite female athletes who are

recognizable brands were selected (e.g., general sport fans would be aware of their

name) as were agents and athletes who were aware of Jennie Finch or Cat Osterman and

the athlete branding process. Snowball sampling techniques were employed by "asking

one informant or participant to recommend others for interviewing" (p. 46).

Through a personal contact, I was given the contact information for three female

agents who currently represent female athletes. I made initial contact with all three

agents and asked them to be a part of the study. After each agent agreed to take part in

the study, arrangements were made to connect via telephone.

I used an existing relationship to contact Cat Osterman via telephone to explain

the study and ask if she would be interested in participating. She agreed to participate in

the one-on-one interview and we set up a time and date for the telephone interview.

During an initial conversation with one female agent, I used snowball techniques

to gain access to Jennie Finch. The agent reached out to Finch about participating in the

study and she confirmed via email that she was willing to participate in the study. I then emailed Jennie to set up a time for the one-on-one phone interview.

For the four softball players, I used existing relationships to call each of them and explain the purpose of the study. I then asked if they would be willing to provide their perspectives on Jennie Finch and Cat Osterman's brands as well as on barriers for female athletes in the brand building process. When each participant agreed, I then set up a time where we could talk via telephone.

After approval by the dissertation committee and upon initial conversation, the interviewees were sent an information letter, approved by the Human Subjects Review Board, detailing the purpose of the study and their rights as a participant. Once the participants agreed to participate, a time was arranged for a one-on-one, in-depth personal interview via telephone. The primary researcher conducted the in-depth interviews with all participants via telephone to allow for in-depth discussions about the participants' experiences in the brand building processes (Creswell, 2012).

Data Collection

Though case study research approaches can utilize both qualitative and quantitative methods (Stake, 2005), this examination utilized qualitative methods to collect data. Qualitative methodology allows for various data gathering techniques (Berg, 2001) and both human sources and nonhuman sources (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The human sources included interviews with various stakeholders in the female athlete branding context. Nonhuman sources included compiling documents and records on Jennie Finch and Cat Osterman's brands. Specifically, this investigation utilized two

data collection techniques: (a) individual in-depth, semi-structured interviews with

Jennie Finch, Cat Osterman, 3 female agents, and 4 softball players, and (b) documents

including website articles, personal websites, and social media platforms. Also,

throughout the data collection stage, I kept a reflexive journal in an attempt to document

thoughts and reflections on each interview. The data gathering techniques are further

explained below.

In-depth, Semi-Structured Interviews

Interview techniques, a common data collection technique in qualitative inquiry,

allow humans to attempt to understand each other (Fontana & Frey, 2005). In-depth

discussions allowed the researcher to learn from the participants and explore topics

surrounding female athlete branding that are not well developed in extant literature

(Morgan, 1997). All interviews were conducted by the primary researcher via telephone.

Interviews lasted between 20-60 minutes in length. They were audio recorded and I

transcribed them verbatim to ensure accuracy and clarity. The primary researcher also

took notes during the interviews to reference important points, emerging ideas, and other

commonalities or differences among the interviews. This enabled the researcher to keep

track of related concepts and ideas during the data collection process (Creswell, 2012).

Interview guides for the two case studies, Finch and Osterman, were semi-

structured to allow the athletes to expand on certain topics and allowed the researcher to

ask additional questions if needed (Fontana & Frey, 2005). The interview guide was

guided by brand identity theory (de Chernatony, 1999; Ghodeswar, 2008) as well as

previous literature on social role theory (Eagly, 1987) and the gendered nature of sport.

Sample questions included: what core values make up your brand? When people hear [your name], what do you want them to think? What strategies do you use to communicate your brand to your target audience? See Appendix D for an example of the interview guide.

The interview guide for the softball players was also guided by brand identity theory, social role theory, and extant literature on branding. Questions were worded to reflect the softball player's perceptions of Jennie Finch and Cat Osterman's brand identity. For example, questions included: What core values do you associate with Jennie Finch? How would you define Cat Osterman's personality and how do you think that impacts her brand? The interview guide for the agents was guided by Ghodeswar's (2008) framework in regards to strategies for branding female athletes. Sample questions included: What strategies do you use to communicate your female athletes' brand? How can female athletes leverage their brand off the field? See Appendix E for an example of the interview guide.

Further, to address research question three, literature on gender and sport as well as social role theory (Eagly, 1987) was utilized to inform interview questions for Finch and Osterman, as well as the agents and additional softball player interviewees. Sample questions included: What types of barriers have you faced as a female athlete when building your brand? Do you think it is more difficult for female athletes as women to self-promote and communicate their self-worth in the brand building process?

Document Analysis

Document analysis lends credence to interviews and helps substantiate findings elicited from the study (Babiak & Wolfe, 2009; Bowen, 2009). Information pertaining to the athletes and their brands was used to provide background information, substantiate and illustrate findings, and supplement information collected from interviews. Before interviews, I obtained five internet articles in regards to female athlete branding and transcribed the ESPN film *Branded*. In order to obtain documents for Jennie Finch and Cat Osterman's brands, I did a Google search for "Jennie Finch brand" and "Cat Osterman brand" and identified 10 articles for each that represented their brand identity (i.e., perceived brand personality, brand associations). Additionally, after interviews were transcribed, I searched for documents in regards to specific strategies Finch or Osterman mentioned. For example, I searched documents about Jennie Finch's association with the New York City (NYC) marathon and Cat Osterman's association with the Austin community.

To assess their positioning and communication strategies, I searched the websites of both Jennie Finch and Cat Osterman. Further, I used their social media platforms including each athletes' Twitter account (@jenniefinch and @catosterman), Facebook fan page, and Instagram account (@jfinch27 and @catosterman) to analyze their posts and communication strategies for delivering their brands' message. Additionally, Jennie Finch's autobiography *Throw Like a Girl*. All of these documents helped provide information that further supported the brand identity creation and branding strategies of

Finch and Osterman as well as the barriers which exist for female athletes. Documents were coded and analyzed in the same manner as interview transcripts (Bowen, 2009).

Data Analysis

As recommended in qualitative research, data were analyzed throughout the data collection and analysis process (Patton, 1990). Thus, data analysis commenced after conducting the first interview and continued throughout the data collection process. After each individual interview, I transcribed the interview verbatim and read over the transcript to review and gain further insight on the interview. According to Strauss (1987), this process allows for further inquiry and conceptualization into the data. This also allowed me to see if further follow-up questions were necessary. If subsequent questions arose, then participants were contacted afterward to garner their perspective on additional questions that were not originally asked. This process allowed me to better understand and to become more familiar with the participants' responses (Marshall & Rossman, 1995).

According to Schwandt (2001), coding is a "procedure that disaggregates the data, breaks it down into manageable segments, and identifies or names those segments" (p. 26). Data were analyzed through a data reduction and thematic coding process using a priori and inductive coding. Guided by brand identity theory and literature (de Chernatony, 1999; Ghodeswar, 2008) and social role theory (Eagly, 1987), a priori codes were developed prior to examining the data in order to assist with the coding (Miles & Huberman, 1994). In order to identify a priori codes, By going line by line through the transcriptions, a priori codes were identified as (a) core values, (b) brand personality, (c)

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brand associations, (d) positioning strategies (e) communication strategies, (f) brand leveraging, (g) barriers for female athletes, and (h) barriers as women.

In addition to a priori codes, a general inductive approach was employed to allow for inductive codes to emerge from the data (Thomas, 2006). First, general category labels were assigned to data such as "aligning with sponsors" or "selective with endorsements." Next, text associated with these categories was coded to further illustrate the meanings, associations, and perspectives of each athlete (Thomas, 2006). For example, the text "I have been authentic to myself" and "I tried to stay true to who I am" was coded as authentic. Then, the data were condensed to more specific themes and descriptions were made about the themes. For example, the category "Finch's core values" included descriptions such as family, faith, and role model.

After the data were condensed into specific themes, I searched for sub-topics or new insights within each theme (Thomas, 2006). From this analysis, dominant themes emerged. For example, "family, faith, and role model" was labeled as the dominant theme "Core values: Other's-Oriented" and "socialized not to be bold, encouraged not to celebrate and speak openly during interviews" was labeled as "ban bossy female athletes." Finally, appropriate quotations were selected to further illustrate the dominant themes (Thomas, 2006). Additionally, I used document analysis to further support the dominant themes.

Initial codes were discussed by the primary researcher and committee chair. As a form of peer debriefing, a doctoral student whose primary research interest is athlete branding, reviewed the codes to identify additional themes that I may have missed.

Together we discussed the emergent and dominant themes which helped provide further insight into the data. In discussions with the peer debriefer, the themes brand longevity and unique selling proposition emerged and discussed further as to how they related to the athletes' brand identity. After discussions and rereading the transcripts, the themes (a) Becoming distinct: Creating your unique selling proposition and (b) Brand longevity: The evolvement of the Finch and Osterman brands were developed. Furthermore, initial themes were sent to Jennie Finch and Cat Osterman to make sure I had correctly captured their brand identity and the strategies they use to position and communicate their brands. Neither Finch nor Osterman had any revisions or suggestions to the transcripts or themes.

NVivo 10 software was utilized to conduct the coding and assist in data management (Corley & Gioia, 2004). NVivo was chosen based on the primary researcher's familiarity with the software as well as its easy-to-use coding and memo writing capabilities.

Reflexivity

In qualitative research, reflexivity is important for ensuring trustworthiness. The researcher serves as a research instrument in the data collection process and may influence the interpretation of the findings (Ely, 1993). As a former college and professional female athlete myself, I understand I hold my own perceptions and assumptions of the brand identity creation process of female athletes. Further, as a softball player I am familiar with both Jennie Finch and Cat Osterman. While it is not possible or desirable to explicate personal experiences and backgrounds from the data

analysis, measures were taken to reduce any potential biases. As suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985), I kept a reflexive journal throughout the data collection process in order to document findings and thoughts as well as to reflect on each interview. In the reflexive journal, I documented my personal thoughts on the interviews and reflected on those thoughts for each interview. Particularly, I noted differences in the brand identities and strategies as they related to Jennie Finch and Cat Osterman. I also noted key advice mentioned by the female agents such as strategies like being proactive and being a good networker.

Trustworthiness

In order to ensure trustworthiness of the study, Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria for enhancing trustworthiness was followed. The following mechanisms to ensure trustworthiness were employed.

Credibility

To ensure credibility of this study, a number of measures were taken including triangulating the data, member checking, and peer debriefing (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). First, to enhance credibility various types of triangulation were used. Triangulating the data involves using a number of methods, sources, and theories (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In this study, data triangulation was achieved by utilizing various sources for data collection (interviews with athletes, interviews with agents, and document analysis).

Member checks were performed with interview participants throughout the process of data collection and analysis in order to further enhance the credibility of the data (Creswell, 2012; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 1990). All participants were

emailed copies of their transcripts and asked to provide feedback in order to verify accuracy of the recorded responses and conclusions. Participants were encouraged to provide additional thoughts to any of the questions asked. None of the participants had any changes or additions to the transcripts. Further, after the data were analyzed, Finch and Osterman were asked to provide feedback on the initial interpretations of the data. Finch did not have any suggestions or concerns, but Osterman did identify her target audience more specific as competitive softball players rather than older softball players. These member checks served as a way to ensure interviewees' voices were accurately captured and to further enhance credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

As a form of peer debriefing, a fellow doctoral student whose research interests are in the area of branding reviewed coding. This served to enhance the credibility of this study by ensuring accurate interpretation of the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). An outsider's perspective can help reduce researcher biases and illustrate themes potentially not seen by the researcher.

Dependability

Dependability allows for other researchers to takeaway similar results if they were to employ the same data gathering techniques. A detailed methods and procedures section thoroughly describing the research process serves to enhance the dependability of the study. Also, to increase dependability researchers followed protocols for a strict transcription and coding process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Confirmability

      Confirmability occurs through neutrality of the researcher and ensuring the research participants answer the research questions as opposed to the researcher (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Steps were taken to ensure researcher neutrality and avoiding influencing participants' answers.

Transferability

      Transferability refers to the level which the study can be transferred to different contexts. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), transferability can occur by providing thick, rich descriptions of research settings to allow other researchers the chance to emulate one's efforts.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter discusses the findings of this investigation. First, I discuss the cases of Jennie Finch and Cat Osterman and how they have defined and established their unique brand identities. Next, Ghodeswar's (2008) brand identity framework is used to explore their brand building strategies. Finally, the perceived barriers for female athletes in the brand building process is discussed.

Findings

The purpose of this case study was to examine the brand identity creation of female athlete brands through the perspective of those involved in the brand building process. Specifically, this instrumental case study examined the brand identity creation of two of the most recognizable brands in the sport of softball: Jennie Finch and Cat Osterman. Through in-depth interviews with Finch and Osterman, various softball athletes, and agents, as well as document analysis, the brand identities of Finch and Osterman were analyzed and strategies for communicating that brand identity were identified. Further, each participant discussed the various barriers they perceive for female athletes in the brand building process as well as strategies for overcoming potential barriers.

In general, the findings provided support for examining athlete brands through the lens of brand identity theory (de Chernatony, 1999). By comparing the brand identity creation of two female athletes, Jennie Finch and Cat Osterman, six themes emerged from the data in regards to the way they defined their brand identity. The first two

themes represented similarities in the way they viewed an athlete brand (a) Am I a Brand? and (b) Authenticity. The additional four themes represented differences in the way the athletes defined their unique brand identity (a) Core Values: Others-Oriented vs. Performance Driven, (b) Brand Personality: Sincere Competitor vs. Serious Competitor, (c) Business-Minded vs. Non-Business Minded, and (d) Brand Associations: Feminine Role Model vs. Dominant Pitcher.

In order to assess the brand building strategies of Finch and Osterman, analysis followed Ghodeswar's (2008) brand identity framework to assess the strategies Finch and Osterman used to leverage their brand identities. From the analysis five central themes emerged (a) Positioning the Brand, (b) Communicating the Brand's Message, (c) Leveraging the Brand's Equity, (d) Becoming Distinct: Creating your own Unique Selling Proposition, and (e) Brand Longevity: The Evolution of the Jennie Finch and Cat Osterman Brands. Further analysis revealed sub-themes within the ways Finch and Osterman positioned, communicated, and leveraged their brand identities. These findings have practical implications for the uniqueness of athlete brands.

Finally, six central themes emerged from the analysis of perceived barriers in the brand building process for female athletes. These included (a) Performance is only part of the package, (b) Ban bossy female athletes, (c) Lack of consistent visibility, (d) Lack of strong brand associations in women's sports, (e) Lack of assistance or guidance, and (f) Breaking barriers? These findings provided support for social role theory (Eagly, 1987) in the context of female athlete branding. All themes are discussed in the following sections.

Battle of the Brand Identities: Jennie Finch vs. Cat Osterman

The first research question assessed how female athletes define their brand identity. To address research question one both Finch and Osterman were asked whether they considered themselves a brand and subsequently asked to define their own personal brands. In the case of Jennie Finch and Cat Osterman, who both were thrust into the national spotlight during the 2004 Olympics, both women have taken different roads to building their brand but both have established their own unique brand identities by knowing who they are.

From the analysis of the two athlete brands, two themes emerged that show similarities in the brand identity creation of Finch and Osterman (a) Am I a Brand? and (b) Authenticity. Further, four themes emerged which showed the uniqueness and distinctiveness when comparing each athlete's brand (a) Core Values: Others-Oriented vs. Performance Driven, (b) Brand Personality: Sincere Competitor vs. Serious Competitor, (c) Business-Minded vs. Non-Business Minded, and (d) Brand Associations: Feminine Role Model vs. Dominant Pitcher. Each theme is discussed in detail below.

"Am I a Brand?"

At the beginning of each interview, I asked each athlete if "they considered themselves a brand." Interestingly, both athletes did not think of themselves as being a brand, but they did believe they had a brand. When asked what her brand was, Finch said she never really looked at it as building a brand. According to Finch, everything she did off the field "always went back to my core values and who I am." However, it appeared

she knew she had a brand and that brand represented everything about her: "My brand is me. I've always tried to make it about who I am and stay true to my values and beliefs."

When asked if she considered herself a brand, Osterman claimed she thought she had a brand but she had not done much with it because it focused "pretty much on just my playing career." Osterman stated, "anything I do with my brand, that's just me. There's no fakeness to it." She believed it was important to have a brand "in order to go approach people" whether that was for clinics or endorsements.

This finding is significant in that it indicates female athletes may not be considering themselves a brand or may have a different perception of what an athlete brand is. Agent 1 believes being a brand is "more than sponsorship deals." She talks to her athletes about "building a life plan and thinking about the long term." While she believes "not every athlete has the tools to become a mainstream brand", she does believe every athlete can "leverage the assets he or she has" even if his or her sport does not "get enough exposure" by finding "other ways to kind of get in the mix."

Though neither Finch nor Osterman regularly referred to themselves as a 'brand', both women were able to describe core values and attributes which they believed made up their identity. From the perspective of Agent 1, this has enabled each to leverage the assets she has and build a life plan based on her brand identity.

Authenticity

Though neither considered herself a brand, it appeared both desired to be authentic. Findings showed Finch and Osterman were insistent that their brand identities were "authentic" and no matter what they wanted to stay true to who they were.

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According to Kapferer (1997), staying true to who they are represents their core identity and the foundational component of their brand identity.

Finch did not use the word authentic herself but did state she has always tried to make her brand about who she is and remain true to her values and beliefs. Osterman referred to her core as being authentic. Similar to Finch, Osterman said everything she does is authentic and represents who she is. She stated everything she does is rooted in her authenticity:

> Everything I do is authentic, everything I do is because I want to do it, it's something I believe in. I'm not gonna go be part of something because it's a good PR move or looks good to people.

Agent 2 stated athlete branding is all about authenticity and remaining true to who you are. From her viewpoint, authenticity and success sells. Agent 3 also credited authenticity for capturing fans attention. Lauren .an Olympic silver medalist herself and Olympic teammate of both Finch and Osterman, credited the success of other female athlete brands to authenticity. From her perspective, "their brands have exploded because they've been so authentic."

In *Branded*, former beach volleyball standout Gabrielle Reece said her whole brand is about authenticity. According to Reece, "if people are being authentic and being themselves" then she is ok with how they leverage their brand identity ("Branded", 2013). Reece has faced scrutiny for posing nude in Playboy but according to her she was comfortable with posing because she controlled the photo shoot and the pictures captured her authentic self.

Thus, it appeared authenticity was a critical element of establishing a brand identity for both Jennie Finch and Cat Osterman.

Core Values: Others-Oriented vs. Performance-Driven

Core values represent the central component of one's brand. Findings illustrated both Finch and Osterman suggest their core values are the foundation for their brand identity. In differentiating the two athlete brands, it appears Finch's core values are more others-oriented and inspirational in nature whereas Osterman's are more performance-driven and functional in nature.

Others-Oriented

Finch specifically stated her brand always goes "back to my core values of who I am." According to Finch, those core values are her family, her faith, and being a role model. Finch often used the phrase "role model" when discussing her brand identity and the importance she placed on being a role model for others. She wants to "encourage, inspire…and just be me to help the next generation."

Lauren supported the notion that Finch's core was others-oriented and inspirational. Lauren believes Finch had "developed an inspiring brand based on her faith and family values" which she stated is "completely consistent with who she [Finch] is as a human being."

de Chernatony (1999) argued one's core value remains consistent through various contexts. Finch, who retired from softball in 2010, claimed her brand used to be centered around her sport and her teammates. However, after retirement and motherhood, her life has drastically changed. The idea of remaining a role model has

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remained consistent throughout her various roles as she stated, "I always have tried to be the best role model I could be." Family has remained a part of her core as she discussed the impact of her parents and brothers when growing up and the importance of her family now as she is a mother and wife. Despite the context, it appears Finch's core identity is very others-oriented.

Performance-Driven

When asked what her core values were, Osterman stated: authentic. Osterman's core identity is connected to her on-field athletic performance. Being a competitor and a successful athlete is what Osterman focuses on as the cornerstone of her brand identity. As Osterman described her brand, she stated her brand is edgy, serious, and completely athletic. Further, she identified her brand as "completely competitive" with "a little bit of spunk and attitude to it." She stated she consciously has not branded herself as "a person who would just do anything and everything, smile on my face all the time type of person" because that is not who she is. Thus, at the core of Cat Osterman's brand identity is authenticity, competitor, and athletic performance.

She also mentioned teaching as part of her core. She said "deep down I care, I want to teach" and "coaching is me." Though she referred to it as her "coaching philosophy" Osterman said she cares about the kids she "comes in touch with." Cassie was one of those players who Osterman coached at a clinic and experienced this side of Osterman. She said Osterman took "time out to look out for a kid and pose her values on that kid" and those values "made a difference" on Osterman. According to Osterman

"being able to make a difference" is a big part of who is she and who she "has started to become" as she has gotten older.

Osterman said she mostly thinks about "how I play on the field" and that making money is "not the most important part of me." In her mind, she wants people to notice her performance first. Lauren recognizes Osterman's performance-driven identity as someone who is "passionate about being the best there is."

Brand Personality: Sincere Competitor vs. Serious Competitor

The brand's core values influence the brand's personality (de Chernatony, 1999). According to Carlson and Donavan (2013), athlete brand personality is different from brand personality as it encompasses both unobservable traits (Brown, Mowen, Donavan, & Licata, 2002) and observable, temporary states fans associate with the athlete (Chaplin, John, & Goldberg, 1988).

Sincere Competitor

With an others-oriented core, Jennie Finch described her personality as approachable, transparent, inspiring, and encouraging. Finch also said she is a fiery competitor inside. According to the interviewees, her personality often comes across as wholeness, family-oriented, down-to-earth, real, and friendly. According to Aaker (1997) these make up the brand personality dimension of sincerity.

Finch called herself a "people pleaser" and told the story of how she was denied an autograph from a player when she was younger and how that has inspired her to make a commitment towards signing every autograph she can after games and events. According to Finch, she tries to "encourage, inspire, be transparent, approachable" to

others. During the interviews, Finch said she wants others to think of her as "a team player. I love to compete…high standards on and off the field as far as integrity and the way I go about competing."

Lauren, one of Finch and Osterman's former Team USA teammates, referred to Finch's personality as wholesome, approachable, and friendly. Former professional pitcher Danielle referred to Finch as "down-to-earth" with a "I was there once attitude." The perception of her as approachable and empathetic seems to align with her willingness to be a role model. Taylor, a current Team USA member, also referred to Finch as wholesome and relational while Cassie, referred to Finch's personality as inspiring.

Serious-Competitor

In contrast, Osterman used words like focused, edgy, serious, and competitive to describe her personality. Others used the words fierce, relentless, invested, and passionate. While Osterman referred to her core as competitive and performance-driven, she stated her personality was shy and focused. Serious was another term she often referenced in regards to her personality. She believes her seriousness stems from her childhood and her playing style: "I've just always been a very serious, even going back to looking back to when I worked with my dad in the driveway and stuff, like I just always looked serious."

One of Osterman's former teammates, Lauren, believed Osterman's personality "directly impacts her brand because she has never wanted to be more than a softball player." Lauren thinks Osterman has always been "passionate about being the best" and

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"being competitive." Cassie, who was one of those kids Osterman touched through coaching, referred to Osterman's personality as compassionate and invested. However, Danielle, another of Osterman's former NPF teammates, said Osterman could come across rude to fans. She stated, "I think she can come off as very selfish and rude to her fans." Further, Taylor said Osterman's personality is competitive which may come across as standoffish off the field.

She believes her "fierceness" and "edginess" stem from her being a competitor. Osterman referred to herself as "a perfectionist" and someone who would not give up until she got something. She believed this "stubbornness" of wanting to get it right contributed to her edginess and her athletic success. Ultimately, her personality is a strong contributor to her on field success as a pitcher:

> If my personality was a little different would I have gotten some of the
>
> opportunities she [Finch] did? Yeah, probably. But at the same time if I had a
>
> little bit of a different personality, would I be the same pitcher I am? Maybe not.

Osterman's agent, Ken Turkel, agreed that Osterman's "edgy" personality was a large part of her brand identity. Comparing Osterman to Finch in terms of personality, Turkel stated, "I've always said she's somewhat of a Maryanne to Jennie Finch's Ginger. She has a vibe that's maybe a little more edgy" (Collins, 2008, para. 1).

Carlson and Donavan (2014) suggested an athlete's personality can be connected with their sport associations. For Osterman, the sport association of her style of play encapsulates her brand personality. According to Osterman, images of her style of play encompass everything about her brand:

I think almost every time you see a shot of me, it's hands overhead, serious

demeanor, where I'm looking at the camera or the batter… but that is my brand,

my image, that's me to a T. That picture encompasses everything I think as my

brand because I'm serious and focused. I want to win.

Business-Minded vs. Non Business-Minded

While Finch herself never used the word "business person" to define her brand,

others view her has having that attribute. Both Agent 3 and Cassie described Finch's

personality as "business-minded." Her agent stated, "She's a business person, she just is

and I think it comes kind of naturally to her." Cassie claimed she viewed Finch as being

"business-like" in the way she leverages her brand through social media and through her

clinics.

In contrast, Osterman stated she "is not very business-minded." While Finch has

created a business with her Jennie Finch Softball Clinics, Osterman said she would

prefer to "do a small clinic somewhere rather than run my own big one" because that fits

her personality.

The significance in this mentality is in how the athlete uses this dimension of her

personality to leverage her brand identity. Finch's agent said athletes who want to build

a brand must come to terms that they are "a small business owner."

Brand Associations: Feminine Role Model vs. Dominant Pitcher

Another element of a brand's extended identity is brand associations. Strong

brand associations enable brands to develop a clear brand identity (Aaker, 1996).

According to the findings, both Finch and Osterman associate their brand with softball

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and credit softball for shaping their identities. According to Finch, softball has blessed her with opportunities and "shaped the very core of who" she is as it taught her many of the values she instills in her identity. In her book, she said "my sport has given me so much in my life" (Finch & Killion, 2011, p. 9). She associated her competitive core with the success she had on the softball field. In an *espnW* article, Osterman said there is nothing she knows as well as the game of softball (Hays, 2013a).

Perhaps, the strongest symbolic association attached to both athletes is the Olympics. Agent 3 stated people watch sports "for the drama and sometimes that drama is national pride like in the Olympics." Finch and Osterman both credited the Olympics as the benchmark for when they first considered themselves a brand. Finch said "the opportunities came flooding in that Olympic year" and that is when she first started thinking of herself as a brand. Her agent said the 2004 Olympics helped put Finch on the radar and that is when "she captured people's attention."

Beyond their sport, findings showed each athlete has distinct associations related to her brand identity. These brand associations were defined as feminine role model and dominant pitcher in accordance to the interviews and documents.

Feminine Role Model

Finch associated her brand identity with femininity and competitiveness, being a role model, and now with being a mom and wife. Findings show Finch associated her brand with femininity and "embraces the feminine side of the game" while still remaining competitive. Though she embraced her feminine associations, she said she "has never been able to get the tomboy" out of her. Many of her strategies reflect these

associations as she navigates the paradox of her feminine and athletic identities. In her book, Finch associates femininity with her own brand and masculinity with her sport. She stated, "I'm considered a really feminine player in a sport that is sometimes considered macho" (Finch & Killion, 2011, p. 54).

As part of knowing who she is and having this feminine-athlete contradiction, Finch has integrated her identity into her logo and her image. As a player, she used accessories to reflect her feminine athlete associations. She liked the fact she had become known as "the pitcher with ribbons in her hair" as it balanced her two sides (Finch & Killion, 2011, p. 55). Finch said part of her image, or extended identity, is wearing bows and makeup. She embraced the identity of "the pitcher who wore bows" and the player who brought "pink into the game but at the same time still feared by hitters." She stated she "liked the contrast between being as tough-as-nails athlete and a hot-pink-on-my nails girl."

Four of the softball players interviewed associated Finch's looks and physical appearance with her brand. Osterman also associated appearance and beauty with Finch's brand. Danielle said, "When I think of Jennie Finch, the first thing that comes to my mind are bows and pink." Taylor said one of the main things she thinks of are the "the color pink and prissy foo-foo bows." Cassie agreed saying Finch has "a more like feminine brand" with "all pink gear." Lauren associated Finch's appearance with her ability to magnify the visibility of her brand. She believed Finch's "beauty and the fact that she has the looks of a model" have helped make her brand more visible.

In an article about Jennie Finch, former Olympic teammate Jessica Mendoza claimed Finch helped set the standard in softball for being able to be feminine and be a great player. Mendoza said she does not think you have to be feminine to play the sport but Finch as inspired "hundreds of thousands of little girls" who now wear glitter headbands and swing hot pink bats (Lepore, 2013, para. 8).

As part of her brand identity, Finch associates who she is with being a role model. The phrase role model consistently came up when talking with Finch about her brand identity. In her book *Throw Like a Girl*, an entire chapter is devoted to her desire to accept and relish the responsibility of being a role model. In her chapter titled "Being a Role Model: Accepting the Big Responsibility" Finch states:

> Being a role model is something I take very seriously. It's a big responsibility, but knowing that girls look up to me makes many of my career and life decisions that much easier (p. 175).

Knowing that she is a role model, Finch associates her brand with positive messages such as healthy living and being an ambassador for women's sports. Since Finch's retirement, Lauren stated she associates Finch's brand with healthy living and fitness as well as "advocating for healthy families and healthy children." Finch also associates her brand as being a role model for women's sports. She stated she is "so grateful for Title IX and all the women before" her who helped create opportunities. She hopes she has "helped create more for the future and for our sport." Mizuno, Finch's equipment sponsor, associates Finch being a role model and ambassador for the game of softball. In an article on her re-signing, Mizuno USA President Bob Puccini said, "We

are proud to re-sign such a well-respected role model in the women's sport community"
(Corporate, 2012, para. 2).

Others associate Finch with inspiration. Cassie associates Finch's attitude with phrases like "dream big" and "if you believe it you can do it" and "shoot for the stars." Similarly, Finch's former college coach, Mike Candrea, thinks of her as a humble role model on and off the field. Candrea was quoted as saying:

Jennie has transformed this sport, touched millions of young kids in many different wants—whether it's fashion, whether it's the way she plays the game— but through it all she's been very humble (Lepore, 2013, para. 9).

Dominant Pitcher

In regards to Osterman, Lauren defined Cat's brand as "a dominant pitcher who is passionate about softball." Similarly, many articles written about Osterman often started with the phrase "the game's most dominant pitcher" which is how Osterman defined herself. Danielle said, "When I think of Cat Osterman I think, "one of the best pitchers in our game".

Osterman associates her brand with competitiveness and passion for performance as well as her university, community, and coaching. Others in the softball community typically associate Cat Osterman with the sport of softball. Cassie said one of the images that first comes to mind when thinking of Osterman is "that picture of her and Megan Willis this past year when they won the championship." Similarly, numerous Internet articles associate Osterman's brand with dominance and ultimate performance. For

example, an article about Osterman's decision to not retire identified Osterman as "one of the most dominant strikeout pitchers" in softball history (Hays, 2013b, para. 2).

Osterman credits the Olympics as being a symbolic part of what her brand is. Her Olympic platform inspired her to think of herself as a brand and create opportunities for her to align herself with other brands. According to Osterman, "it took until about 2008 before I really thought about me being a brand." Then, when softball was taken out of the Olympics, she believed she lost one of her strongest brand associations:

> Once softball came out of the Olympics a good chunk of our endorsements went away so then you have to think about how else you're going to make money…You have to have a brand in order to go approach people whether it's for clinics or camps or whatever. So softball being out was definitely a big part of that.

One of Osterman's strongest brand associations is her affiliation with the University of Texas and the city of Austin. Lauren connects Osterman with her Texas roots and the University of Texas. Similarly, Taylor, who also played at the University of Texas, associates Osterman with the Longhorns. According to Osterman, she wants to associate with her alma mater:

> I like to associate with the University of Texas. I feel like going there really…gave me the opportunity to really excel.

Connie Clark, Osterman's former head coach at the University of Texas, agreed Osterman's association with the university as part of Osterman's distinctiveness:

She has been the most iconic softball athlete at the University of Texas as well as in the state of Texas…We are extremely proud of her and her representation of our program (Corona, 2013, para. 8).

Further, Osterman associates her brand more with Austin, the home of her alma mater, rather than her hometown of Houston. From her perspective, she is "much more tied to Austin than Houston." Due to her association she focuses more of her attention on leveraging her brand in Austin as opposed to Houston:

I try to do a lot of philanthropic things here in Austin versus in Houston. I'll go back to Houston and do events if I'm asked to but I'm not running around screaming 'I'm reppin H town.'

By creating strong associations to one's brand identity, athletes can appropriately position their brands in the minds of consumers. Both functional and emotional associations add value to the brand's identity (Ghodeswar, 2008), however, attached emotional value helps brands stand out more rather than just functional value (Aaker & Joachimsthaler, 2000). Findings suggest Finch has created more emotional associations for her brand as the "feminine role model" whereas Osterman's associations appear to be more functional and sport-based as the "dominant pitcher." The associations with being a role model carry an inspirational and emotional value which seem to have benefitted Finch's brand identity and allowed her to position her identity in the minds of consumers.

After identifying their unique brand identities, the next part of the study focused on how each of these athletes packaged her brand identity and strategies each used to leverage her brand equity.

Brand Building Strategies

The second research question sought to ascertain the brand building strategies employed by elite female athletes and their management teams to leverage their brands. In order to address this research question, Ghodeswar's (2008) brand identity framework was used to guide the data analysis. Three of Ghodeswar's elements emerged from the data: (a) Positioning the brand, (b) Communicating your Brand's Message, and (c) Leveraging the Brand Equity. Two additional themes emerged as well (d) Becoming Distinct: Creating your Unique Selling Proposition and (e) Brand Longevity: The Evolution of the Jennie Finch and Cat Osterman Brand. Within these five central themes, analysis revealed each athlete uses unique strategies to leverage her brand off the field. These themes are discussed in detail below.

Positioning the Brand

Brand positioning is defined as, "a relatively stable set of consumer perceptions (or meanings) of a brand in relation to competitive alternatives" (Kates & Goh, 2003, p. 59). Positioning is influenced by communication strategies and various marketing variables and used as a tool to break through clutter (Aaker & Shansby, 1982; Ferreira, Hall, & Bennett, 2008). Though each athlete's brand identities were different, there was evidence that supported their positioning strategies were consistent with how each athlete defined her own brand identity. Findings from the study revealed both athletes

were aware of their audience, created brand differentiation, and selectively choose endorsers as part of their positioning strategies.

Know Your Audience

According to Milligan (2009), every brand has a core fan base and it is important to know this fan base because "the essence of the brand has to appeal to them" (p. 235). Finch identified her core audience as the youth and Osterman identified her core audience as "young softball players." Further segmenting their audiences, Finch said her audience was specifically pre-teens and teens, as well as their parents. Osterman believed hers was "the competitive softball player" as her brand identity spoke more to older and more competitive softball players.

Agent 3 stated it was important that female athletes "figure out who their audience is and how to speak to them." According to Agent 3, "the softball audience is made up of eight to 17 year old girls and their parents." Agent 3 stated Finch has always been aware of who her audience was and that she "needed to be able to appeal" to that particular softball audience. Taylor believes Finch as done a young job at targeting "very young girls." Lauren believed Finch had done a good job at targeted "the gamut of softball and players" as her audience. She also felt Finch's brand spoke more to the male audience based on her being "drop dead gorgeous" and due to her being "a great competitor."

Taylor thought Osterman did not "want to target young girls" instead "she goes more towards the high schooler" or older crowd. Lauren believed Osterman's audience "focused more on the softball players, the pitchers." Whereas she thought Finch targeted

"the whole softball family experience." According to Lauren, Finch's audience "is probably a lot more diverse in age" whereas Osterman's is the "elementary, junior high, maybe early high school" age range.

Brands also have additional audiences based on their different relationships and experiences (Milligan, 2009). For example, while both Finch and Osterman acknowledged their fan base, an additional audience for them is their sponsors. Finch believed her sponsors built a relationship with her because she remained true to who she was:

> I have this core group of sponsors who believed in me and trusted in me and sponsored me wanting me to represent their brand. And they did that because of who I am and what I represent.

Based on the cases of Finch and Osterman, it appears female athletes must know their audience and understand as a person and an athlete, they will have various audiences and brand relationships. As the brand owner, the athlete must understand what her audience values from its relationship with the athlete and then deliver that value to the audience (Milligan, 2009).

Creating Brand Differentiation

One brand positioning objective is to create differentiation. According to Kardes (1998), integrated strategies are used to position the brand to consumers and create differentiation in consumers' minds. While both athlete brands are associated with softball, conscious positioning of their other unique attributes and identity have helped differentiate Finch and Osterman's brands within the sport of softball. In turn, this has

enhanced their brand identity and established strong associations for each. As mentioned before, Finch has created the brand identity of others-oriented, sincere competitor, and feminine role model. Osterman has created the brand identity of performance-driven, serious competitor, and dominant pitcher. It appears they have created this differentiation as their former teammate Lauren thinks of Finch as "a strong female who is also wholesome and grounded and rooted in her family and faith" while she thinks of Osterman as "a dominant pitcher who is passionate about softball."

Both Finch and Osterman identified themselves as competitors but their style of play differentiates what type of competitor they are. By attaching other elements of their identity to this competitive attribute, Finch embraces more of the "sincere competitor" while Osterman operates as the "serious competitor." Finch continuously discussed how she embraced the "feminine" side of her and positioned her femininity through her color scheme and hair accessories. Osterman actually stated she does not care "what my hair looks like or what bow I'm wearing." She also acknowledged that she knows she does not smile a lot and believes her competitiveness shines through her style of play. Going back to her childhood days, she acknowledged she has "always looked serious. I was a competitor."

Osterman called Finch "a phenomenal pitcher" but she believes others think more about Finch's looks rather than "the amazing pitcher she was in the circle." According to Osterman, though she knows there have been comments in regards to her looks, she does not want her "looks to be the first and foremost thing" of her brand. Danielle believes Finch uses her physical appearance "very subtly and respectfully" to

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differentiate her brand. In her book, Finch acknowledged this perception of her looks but she felt like the "feminine" image was exactly who she was as a person and competitor:

> I supposed I could have stopped wearing makeup or ribbons or anything pink to try to prove to those critics that I was just as tough and fierce as any other player. But why should I have done that? Why couldn't I just be myself? (p. 57).

In product branding, brands can be perceived as being different by the attributes or benefits the product provides, the product price, being a pioneer brand, when and how the product is consumed, and who consumes the product (Aaker & Shansby, 1982). In regards to the softball equipment each athlete has created, Osterman acknowledged the differences in their names:

> People are like 'oh I have the Jennie Finch glove' and 'oh I have your Cat bat'…you don't have to put a last name to it and I think that's pretty cool.

Osterman also believe her singular "Cat" provides "a little edgy feel." This edginess is perhaps once of the biggest differences in the two athletes. She told a story about Finch's appearance on Celebrity Apprentice and how each athlete acknowledged their personality differences. According to Osterman, Finch believed she got voted off because she was too nice for the show but felt the style of the show fit Cat's personality:

> And she was like 'Cat you would have been good at it, I needed your bitchiness…And I just laughed because well like how do I take that, but at the same time it's true.

Documents noted the perceived differences between Finch and Osterman's identities. One of Osterman's former NPF teammates, Alissa Haber, cited Osterman's edginess and personality as differences from Finch's brand:

> She's [Osterman] kind of like the antithesis to Jennie in a lot of ways…Jennie's always bubbly and personable, and Cat's also personable, but she's also very direct…she's got an edge to her, and that's what makes her great (Hays, 2013, para. 17).

Both Jennie Finch and Cat Osterman are pitchers, both have competed in two Olympics, both have played professionally, and both have accumulated numerous awards and records. However, both are perceived differently based on their identities and how those identities have been positioned.

"Turned Down for What?"

The theme "turned down for what" represents Finch and Osterman's positioning strategy of being selective when choosing brand associations. Findings revealed sponsorship selection was part of the brand positioning strategies for Finch and Osterman. Finch claimed she had to "truly believe in it to endorse it" and she thinks "it's so important for athletes to be selective."

Both selectively choose endorsement deals based on how the endorser's brand aligned with her own brand. They consciously considered what their target audience would think if they aligned themselves with particular brands or sponsorship opportunities. For example, Finch stated she has been "very selective over the years"

when choosing endorsements or sponsors because she did not want to let her fans, or the parents of her fans down or disappoint them. Her agent supported this stating:

> If Maxim magazine wanted to have a story on her then she was like no because I don't want a 13 year old girl to be like oh the softball player I love, Jennie Finch, mom go get that magazine.

Finch credited her brother for helping her recognize how certain endorsements might not send the right message or create the perceived associations she is trying to communicate. In *Throw Like a Girl*, Finch explains why she turned down lucrative offers for posing in male magazines. She said her brother asked her what she thought parents and their daughters would think about her if they saw her posing in those magazines. She consciously considered how her brand would be positioned in her fans' minds. Finch said "I would have lost my self-respect and the respect of many young girls and their families" (Finch & Killion, 2011, p. 175).

Osterman referred to her brand personality when she discussed the endorsements or events she chooses to associate with. Describing herself as shy, said she appreciates her down time when not playing or coaching. As a result, she turns down endorsements or appearances which require her to do "a ton of appearances with a hundred screaming kids because it's just not a part of who I am." Her core values are embedded in the events and opportunities she does select, "I am competitive…and I'm very focused…so at the same time, the events I do take part in are things I really enjoy going to."

One sponsor Osterman does align herself with is Under Armour. She feels Under Armour's brand identity is similar to hers, citing brand associations "edgy" and

"confident" as descriptors of both her and Under Armour. Also, Under Armour's relationship with Osterman only required her to wear its product, do occasional photo shoots, and play. To Osterman, this aligned well with her brand identity:

That's why I worked well with Under Armour…it was very much we want you to play. And I'm like great, because for me personally that's all I want to do, I just want to go play…and not worry about all this other stuff.

In an interview about Osterman's sponsorship deals, her agent, Ken Turkel, agreed that they strategically align with sponsors who match Osterman's brand. Specifically, Turkel mentioned they align with sponsors who match Osterman's "edgy" vibe. According to Turkey, they "go with Under Armour because they have that edgier, maybe a little more fresh, marketing and it fits Cat's image very well" (Collins, 2008, para. 1).

In essence, both women are selective when choosing co-branding opportunities based on how they want to position their brand's identity. According to Aaker (1996), a brand's position is the "part of the brand identity and value proposition that is to be actively communicated to the target audience" (in Ghodeswar, 2008, p. 6). Thus, they position their brands based on what they want communicated to their target audience. In effect, they hope to deliver value to their audience.

Communicating the Brand's Message

Positioning one's brand helps prioritize the focus of the brand identity and carve out a vision for how the brand should be communicated to its target audience (Ghodeswar, 2008). Ghodeswar identified several communication strategies corporate

brands use to effectively position and communicate their brand identity including advertising, endorsements, sponsorships, public relations, and the Internet. Findings from this study revealed Finch and Osterman use a combination of communications strategies to deliver their brand's message. These include social media, personal websites, speaking to youth, and autographs. Finch has also written a book about her life that communicates her brand identity.

Social Media

Finch and Osterman are both very active on social media and both consciously think of their viewers when posting. Their posts appear to align well with their intended brand identities and positioning strategies. When viewing their Twitter accounts, Finch's posts reflected her brand positioning strategy as a role model speaking often about softball tips as well as inspirational messages. Agent 3 said she encouraged Finch to use Twitter to help communicate her brand. She stated, "As we were building her brand, Twiter came into existence and she really jumped on those things with some serious encouragement on my part."

According to Agent 3, the best part about Finch using social media platforms is Finch can "communicate exactly who she is through them." Finch is "documenting her life and she is basically sharing with her fans and peope who are interested in her." Cassie, who stated she has never met Finch personally, stated, "I know I keep going back to social media but that's the only way I know Jennie Finch." Danielle believes Finch "is great at social media and selling her brand" because she "always posts about her faith and family on social media."

Osterman's tweets were often sports related and she often spoke directly to the softball community. According to Osterman she is aware young kids view her social media posts but she does not "try to dumb it down to kid-friendly just because" a younger audience is viewing it. Analyzing Osterman's tweets showed she had several retweets of the University of Texas's twitter account and had posts congratulating individual softball players or teams on various accomplishments.

According to Cassie, Finch and Osterman communicate their brand identity differently on Twitter: which speaks to how each differentiates her brand (Pegoraro & Jinnah, 2012).

> …her [Finch] tweets are very short, to the point. Like anybody can understand it. Comparing that to Cat she's gonna use the whole 140 characters to get her thought out. And Cat's like not afraid to speak her mind either

According to Finch, social media is "just another platform to reach out and stay connected and to be real." All three agents referenced social media as a viable tool for female athletes to communicate their brand's message. Similarly, Pegoraro and Jinnah (2012), agree athletes should use social media to enhance their own personal brand equity and engage with their target audience.

Personal Website

While Finch did not discuss her website in her interview, www.jenniefinch.com is another outlet for her to communicate her brand identity. On her website, Finch has information in regards to her clinics and her branded apparel she sells. The website has a pink color scheme and is full of pictures with Finch and her family. Her website also has

links for her social media accounts of Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook. Also, on her website is a hashtag with her personal slogan #DreamandBelieve.

Osterman did mention her website as part of her communication strategy, but she said she is "really bad at keeping up with it." Her website, www.catosterman.com, has a red, white, and blue color scheme with an image of her pitching in her Team USA uniform on the front. On her website, she lists her Twitter and Instagram accounts as well as her sponsors Wilson, DeMarini, and Longhorn Bar. She also has a blog on her website. According to Osterman, blogging has been part of her communication strategy in the past. However, she has not blogged very consistently.

Speaking to Youth

The theme speaking to youth incorporates both of Finch and Osterman's strategies of using various methods to reach their youth audience. Finch speaks to the youth mostly through her camps and clinics. Osterman speaks to youth mostly through coaching. According to Finch, the best way to communicate and impact her youth audience, besides social media, is "through my appearances along with camps and clinics." According to Osterman, she believes the best way she reaches her audience is through coaching and occasional clinics. Sport-specific clinics offer athletes a unique strategy for delivering their brand's message.

The Autograph Effect

Another communication strategy athletes can use to interact and communicate with fans is by signing autographs. References to autographs were mentioned often throughout the study and it appeared autographs are a strategy for athletes to

communicate their brand. The effect of this communication strategy has the potential to add value for fans. Finch said she was denied an autograph by one of her role models growing up and told herself she never wanted to be that person. Finch believes giving "that extra little effort" to sign as many autographs as she can will "touch or make an impact on somebody." Similarly, Agent One said athletes "be willing to take time and energy" to do things like "being willing to sign autographs." In contrast, Osterman believes fans should respect the competitiveness of a player after a game. After a game she wants to "get to the locker room and calm down" rather than sign autographs right away. According to others, this may be perceived negatively by fans. Danielle stated, "I have experienced multiple instances where she was…complaining that she has to sign autographs."

Book

One of Finch's most unique communication strategies was her book *Throw Like a Girl*. Finch said she wrote the book "to share the failures and struggles as well as my dreams coming true." Writing her own book provided her an opportunity to tell her own story. She believed people "looked at my ribbons and my makeup and my blonde hair and made a lot of assumptions about who I was" (Finch & Killion, pp. 56-57). But what they missed was that her "girly exterior housed a fiercely competitive athlete" (p. 56). Thus, her book allowed her to show how much "blood, sweat, and tears" went into "the trophies and red carpet."

According to Ghodeswar, the communication objectives in corporate branding include the type of message, the differentiation strategies to be achieved, and creating

themes which appeal to the target audience. Whatever the strategy is, it is important for the brand to consistently and repeatedly create communication through the various communication channels. From the analysis, it appears Finch is more consistent with communicating her message through various communication channels than Osterman as Osterman stated she does not keep up with her website or blogging.

Leveraging the Brand Equity

Ghodeswar (2008) identified several strategies for corporate brands to leverage their brand identity including line extensions, brand extensions, ingredient branding, co-branding, brand alliances, and social integration. The findings revealed Finch's main strategies for leveraging her brand are through her products and apparel, self-branded clinics, co-branding with sponsors, and her alliance with events such as the New York City (NYC) Marathon. Osterman's main strategies for leveraging her brand are equipment, coaching collegiately and philanthropic work with Reviving Baseball in Inner Cities (RBI) Austin. Both athletes appear to use co-branding as a strategy for leveraging their personal brand identities. Further, both leverage their brand identity based on how they have positioned and communicated their core values, personality, and personal brand associations which supports Ghodeswar's (2008) framework.

Equipment/Apparel

Both Finch and Osterman also have their own equipment lines with Mizuno and Wilson-DeMarini respectively. It appears both have integrated their brand identity into their products. Finch's line is the first softball-specific line to use the color pink. To Finch, the pink is a "fierce pink" which in her opinion reflects her feminine and

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"tomboy" traits. Finch stated, "it's been pretty amazing to bring pink into our game but at the same time to be feared by hitters."

Osterman has worked with sporting manufacturer Wilson since she graduated from college. She believes Wilson has "supported softball as much as they have baseball." Part of this support is by leveraging Osterman's brand and softball success through the Cat Osterman glove and bat series.

Finch has also created the Finch Windmill as another way to leverage her brand identity. Her book describes how Finch's dad actually designed the Finch Windmill as a training tool for Finch when she was younger. Now, they use Finch's platform and brand to sell the Finch Windmill as a training tool to young, aspiring softball pitchers.

Finch uses the slogan "Dream and Believe" on many of her products and wording. Her "Dream and Believe" headbands represent both a tangible element and carry her inspirational associations. Her slogan is present across her social media platforms of Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. Finch stated the slogan is representative of her core values.

Co-Branding with Sponsors

Co-branding is defined as "a form of cooperation between two or more brands with significant customer recognition, in which all the participants' brand names are retained" (Blackett & Boad, 1999, p. 7). Endorsements can be viewed as co-branding opportunities for athletes where their product endorsement creates equity for both the endorsed product and also the endorsing athletes (Seno & Lukas, 2007). As mentioned before, Finch and Osterman both use endorsements to communicate and position their

brand identities. Finch has been associated with Mizuno since she graduated from the University of Arizona. In collaboration with Mizuno, Finch was the first to bring the color pink into softball equipment. She also serves as a softball ambassador and assists Mizuno with its research and development of softball products (Corporate, 2012). This brings value to Mizuno as well by associating with one of the games' most recognizable brands and by being the first equipment manufacturer to target young female softball players:

> When I was young there wasn't a lot of softball equipment available to girls. We had to buy boy's equipment. So when I started working with the athletic equipment company Mizuno, it was so exciting for me to be involved in making girl-centric changes to products (Finch & Killion, 2011, p. 56).

> For a co-branding opportunity to exist, both parties must generate awareness and an image in consumers' minds (Keller, 1998). According to the findings, interviewees associated pink softball equipment with Jennie Finch and associated Jennie Finch with the color pink. Danielle said, "when I think of Jennie Finch, the first thing that comes to mind are bows and pink!" Further, when discussing Finch and the color pink, participants mentioned Mizuno. Thus, it appeared Mizuno and Finch have positioned the Finch brand and the color pink in the minds of others.

Clinics

Finch's conscious strategy for positioning herself as a role model has afforded her opportunities to leverage her brand well after her playing career. She used her core values of inspiring others and her business personality to create the Jennie Finch Softball

Clinics. Finch stated her reason for starting her own clinics stemmed from her experiences working other clinics. The idea to facilitate her own Jennie Finch branded clinics allowed her to incorporate her own values and her own preferences for teaching young players. According to Finch, her clinics are an extension of her personal brand identity: "My clinics are more me and they get to see who I am." Her clinics also afford her the opportunity to integrate another core value of hers as both her family and her in-laws play a role in facilitating her clinics. She also uses former teammates as camp instructors:

> …it's been a great way to stay connected and to not only see my parents and my teammates as well but at the same time being able to stay involved with the game.

Strategic Alliances Beyond the Sport

Part of leveraging one's brand is to create additional associations (Ghodeswar, 2008). Finch has created additional associations to her brand recently through a strategic alliance with the NYC Marathon. Through an endorsement by Timex, Finch completed her first marathon and donated $1 to the New York Road Runners Youth Program for every participant she passed in the race (Badenhausen, 2011). According to Finch, this partnership was "a great way to tap into a new market" and an opportunity to participate in an event for charity. Finch, who ran the marathon four and a half months after giving birth (Badenhusen, 2011), also saw this leveraging strategy as a way to speak to other moms and inspire them to get active. Finch relished the opportunity to inspire moms:

I think too just being a mom and sharing the struggles of everything it takes.

That's a way to reach people and to encourage and interact.

Due to Osterman's association with the University of Texas and the city of Austin, Osterman is now leveraging her brand through a strategic alliance with RBI Austin. RBI is a national organization started by a former Major League Baseball player to engage young baseball and softball players athletically, academically, and spiritually (Nyfeler, 2013). According to Osterman, she was inspired to partner with RBI when they started their Austin chapter. For RBI Austin, it made sense to associate with Cat Osterman for its softball program as she is a very notable brand in the Austin community due to her illustrious college career. RBI Director Matt Price acknowledged the value the Osterman brand brought his nonprofit organization and its members:

Cat has definitely been a voice for softball in Austin, Texas, the nation, and the world…What better face for the sport and for RBI Austin than Cat Osterman? (Nyfeler, 2013, para. 4).

Osterman has taken an active role in initiating RBI Austin's softball program including participating on its board. Osterman said her involvement with RBI has inspired her to become more involved in the Austin community including giving talks at local Boys and Girls Clubs. As she is towards the end of her playing career, Osterman sees community youth as an extension of her brand. Working with kids in the Austin community to her is "another way to give back to the community who really needs it" (Nyfeler, 2013, para. 3).

Coaching

While Finch has built a business out of her brand with the Jennie Finch Softball

Clinics, Osterman mostly leverages her brand identity through coaching. Currently,

Osterman is the assistant softball coach at St. Edwards University, a Division II school

in Austin. While many associate Osterman with the University of Texas from her college

days, Osterman has created additional associations through her career as a college coach.

Lauren Lauren, Osterman's former teammate, stated she now associates Osterman with

St. Edwards as well as the city of Austin:

> She's very rooted as like a Texas girl, born and raised in Texas and so much
>
> loyalty to the University of Texas as well and where she coaches now at St.
>
> Edwards.

The key to leveraging the brand's equity is to deliver value to one's audience.

Ultimately, by packaging their brand identity and delivering their brand's message

through strategic off-field endeavors, Finch and Osterman have leveraged their brand's

equity. However, in comparing the two, it appears Finch has become the stronger, or

more distinct, brand. Further analysis helped explained why this has happened.

Becoming Distinct: Creating your Unique Selling Proposition

Brands are a distinctive identity that delivers an enduring, credible, and relevant

promise of value (Aaker, 1996). When brands deliver this identity and value they

differentiate themselves and create a preference in their desired marketplace (Schmitt &

Simonson, 1997) because they develop trust with their consumers (Ghodeswar, 2008).

The unique selling proposition (USP) is a framework for analyzing distinctiveness in a

brand (Reeves, 1961). A USP provides brands a competitive advantage by (a) displaying an eagerness to sell the product, (b) creating desirability for potential customers, and (c) establishing that the product is truly unique. Perhaps, the difference between the branding processes of Osterman and Finch can be described by their USP and how Finch has become a distinct brand.

Finch's distinctiveness could be explained by her USP as the "feminine role model." During the interview, Finch's advice for other females was "find your niche, you have a special gift, embrace it and let it shine." It appears Jennie Finch found her niche by using her gift of being a role model and embracing her femininity while being competitive. She has packaged her brand identity to create her own USP. It appears she has an eagerness to use different outlets to get her positive messages out whether it is through her clinics, speaking engagements, or her co-creation of products with Mizuno. She has created desirability from young girls who aspire to be like her and who desire the color pink in their softball equipment as well as desirability from parents who want their daughters to learn from Finch. Finch is unique in the sense she is a two-time Olympian, NCAA National Champion, and one of the best pitchers in the world who also values giving back to the sport and youth. These three elements are then encapsulated in a single, memorable slogan (Miller & Henthorne, 2006). Finch's "Dream and Believe" personal slogan encapsulates her USP as the feminine role model.

It appears Finch has created a distinct brand because she consistently positions her brand according to her unique USP. Lauren Lauren said she believed Finch had developed a strong brand because "she lived it." And when "people meet her they aren't

disappointed because the brand is real." Jennie Finch lives her brand and positions her brand based on emotional associations and her core values. These emotional associations resonate with her fans and help her build a strong identity that differentiates from competitors (Aaker, 1996).

In contrast, it appears Osterman has not created a USP. Though she has positioned herself as performance-driven and wants fans to know her as "the athlete and as the competitor," she has not packaged her brand's position to create a distinct brand according to the USP framework (Reeves, 1961). However, Osterman has referenced her personality as one of the reasons she is not proactive in her attempts to create a brand off the field. Interviewees support this as Danielle said, "I don't think her brand has developed off the field." According to Lauren, Osterman has "never wanted to be more than a softball player."

Brand Longevity: The Evolvement of the Jennie Finch and Cat Osterman Brands

From examining the brand identity creation of Finch and Osterman, it appears both athletes have seen their brands evolve throughout their lives. Both athletes have transitioned from college softball superstars, to life with and without the Olympics, and to professional careers. For Finch, her life has also transitioned to life outside of softball. Contrarily, Osterman said she has mainly focused on performance but she is beginning to see how her brand is transforming and the need for it to transform after softball. According to Finch, her brand has always been about staying true to who she is:

I never looked at it as I was building a brand. I tried to stay true to who I am and the way I was raised. It was about my sport and my teammates. It was always about trying to live out God's will for my life.

Both Finch and Osterman have maintained their core identities and remained authentic throughout their life transformations, but, it appears only Finch has adapted her brand to create value that transcends the sport. According to Taylor, Finch has adapted her brand by putting herself out there whereas Cat has mainly focused on playing:

I think Jennie does a great job at selling her brand…She represents herself as a mom, hardworking business woman, coach, role model, and a fashion icon… I don't think Cat does anything outside of playing to build her brand.

Finch retired in 2010 but has combined her core values with her current situation to create additional associations and long-term value, or brand equity. While Finch and her agent credit the 2004 Olympics as the initial platform for Finch's brand, she has created a long-term brand centered on her core values, her brand relationships, and the equity she has created through additional brand associations off the field (de Chernatony, 1999). Finch stated she has seen her brand evolve from a tomboy who "hawked loogies" with her brothers, to a competitive pitcher who wore bows in her hair, into a wife and mother of three. From Finch's perspective, she remains who she is through each life situation:

I feel my brand has changed somewhat after softball…my life has changed drastically since becoming a mother and into new adventures living life in the

country. I always have tried to be the best role model I could be the future

generation.

Through this brand identity evolvement, Finch has remained true to who she is

and extended her core values into each of life's transformations. Thus, she has

maintained brand longevity by repositioning her brand based on external factors (i.e.,

motherhood). Lauren believes Finch's brand has longevity because it is "completely

consistent with who she is as a human being" which has helped her transcend from just a

softball player to an inspirational brand.

Osterman, who still plays for the USSSA Pride in the NPF, acknowledged that

she has not put a lot of effort into building a brand off the field because her focus is on

playing. However, she is aware she is at the end of her playing career and knows there

"will have to be a transformation at some point."

Part of that transformation is in maintaining the balance between being "a fierce

competitor" while still being "able to relate to younger people." She specifically

referenced coaching when talking about her awareness for adapting her brand identity:

I can't be the edgy bitch and think someone is gonna want me to come talk at

their recruiting event.

Towards the end of the interview Osterman referenced her personal evolution

and how making a difference in young people's lives is starting to become a bigger part

of who she is. She stated being a difference maker is "not something that I push to the

forefront of my brand but…as I've gotten older I notice I enjoy doing." This conscious

thought has sparked her desire to create additional associations off the field that can transition into long-term value such as her partnership with RBI Austin.

Osterman has also realized the long-term value her brand has in helping grow the sport of softball:

But as I've gotten older, I've embraced [the responsibility for the health of the league] and I've tried to do more of exactly what the league wants to do, interact with fans and promote it and tweet it and talk about it, all that kind of stuff (Hays, 2013a, para. 19).

Though branding theories can be applied to human brands (Thomson, 2006), there are differences between human brands and traditional product brands (Parmentier & Fischer, 2012). By looking at the brand longevity of Finch and Osterman, it appears one of those differences is the live transformations female athletes face. Both athletes lost one of their strongest symbolic associations when softball was taken out of the Olympics. Further, Finch has since retired from softball and gone through life changes such as getting married and becoming a mother. Despite life transformations, Finch has created brand longevity by initially capitalizing off her sport platform and building a brand identity that creates long-term value for her audience. As Osterman is nearing retirement, it will be interesting to see how she adapts her brand identity post-softball.

Given the case subjects are female athletes and the barriers for women in sport are well documented, it was necessary to examine potential barriers which may impede female athletes' ability to establish their brand identities and create brand longevity.

The Barriers

The third research question assessed potential barriers in the brand identity creation process of female athletes. To address this research question, all interview participants were asked to provide their perspectives on barriers female athletes face as athletes as well as barriers they face in regards to being women. While many barriers were discussed throughout interviews and mentioned throughout documents, these findings focus on barriers which specifically impede female athlete's abilities in creating and leveraging their brand identity. The barriers which emerged included (a) Performance is Only Part of the Package, (b) Ban Bossy Female Athletes, (c) Lack of Consistent Visibility, (d) Lack of Strong Brand Associations in Women's Sports, (e) Lack of Assistance or Guidance, and (f) Breaking Barriers? Below, these themes are further discussed.

Performance is Only Part of the Package

When asked about potential barriers in the brand building process, findings showed support that female athletes could not rely on performance and athletic success alone to build a brand. All three agents interviewed claimed if female athletes want to build a brand, then they have to build a brand based on performance and something else. In fact, Agent 1 specifically said "female athletes cannot rely on performance alone to make a career for themselves." This was supported by the film Branded where the directors said "winning or being the best is not enough for a woman to rise to the top" in sports marketing (ESPN Films, 2013).

Beyond being successful athletes, Agent 1 suggested female athletes should excel at other things such as appearance, articulating well, wanting to give back to the world, and being willing to try new things which are "all things guys don't have to do." However, in her opinion this barrier could be viewed as a benefit for female athletes in that they are developing more well-rounded skillsets off the field. Finch said that for female athletes, it takes work to build a brand and remain relevant over time.

Several interviewees discussed the difference between male and female athletes in the brand building process particularly in reference to performance. Osterman stated, "I feel like it's more difficult for female athletes to brand themselves based on their athletic performance." She believed male athletes did not need to do additional things to build a brand nor did their physical attractiveness matter when they were building a brand.

Many of the interviewees felt male athletes did not need to build a brand because they made enough money from their playing salaries. Agent 2 stated male athletes make "plenty of money just competing in their sport" and do not necessarily need to build a brand off the field. Finch agreed, stating she does not think many male athletes have brands but the difference is for "men they don't have to build a brand, they make their money playing."

However, female athletes, with the exception of perhaps tennis players in their opinions, could not make enough money from playing salaries alone and, therefore, needed to do something off the field to leverage their brands. Agent 3 stated:

There are plenty of male athletes who don't understand branding but they're making the major league minimum of half a million dollars a year so it doesn't matter as much to them.

Based on participants perceived differences between male and female athletes in regards to their brand, the biggest difference was that male athletes can make a long-term living off their playing salaries and do not necessarily need to build a brand if they do not want to or if it does not fit their identity. In contrast, female athletes do not have the privilege of making a long-term living off just being an athlete and thus, they need to take measures off the field to create money-making opportunities for themselves. According to the participants, these brands they build cannot be based solely on performance. They argue there needs to be additional associations to their brand identity beyond just athletic success.

Thus, the findings indicated female athletes must build a brand off more than their athletic success and it is important for them to build a brand off the field as their playing contracts do not afford them lucrative salaries. It would appear leveraging a female athlete's brand off the field is important for long-term value and brand equity.

Ban Bossy Female Athletes!

"When a little boy asserts himself, he's called a "leader." Yet when a little girl does the same, she risks being branded "bossy." Words like bossy send a message: don't raise your hand or speak up" (banbossy.com, n.d.)

The 'ban bossy' campaign is a global movement started by Facebook CEO Sheryl Sandberg which encourages young girls to lead. Five of the interviewees actually

referenced the national 'ban bossy' campaign in reference to the socialization of girls and women. One of the agents said a main barrier facing all women, not just female athletes, is that "from an early age we're not encouraged to be bold, we're not encouraged to be bossy, we're not encouraged to talk about ourselves." Agent 3 agreed, comparing female athlete branding to the ban bossy campaign:

> I think it's a societal thing. It's not just on the field…it's like the whole ban bossy thing. If you speak up and direct people you're bossy. And there's a way we talk about women as a society and I think that affects our female athletes.

> Several of the athletes and agents said young girls are not taught to be bold or vibrant when expressing their identities. One agent suggested young girls are told not to have a strong personality, not to celebrate, and not to be extravagant in their emotions. Thus, young girls are taught to exude communal behaviors as opposed to agentic behaviors (Eagly, 1987). According to Lauren:

> A lot of that has to do with socialization of females. I think it's getting better but we're socialized to like be modest you know and not talk about ourselves in interviews.

> These traditional gender roles young girls are taught not only affect female athletes, they face women in general. One agent stated the barriers in branding are gender specific in that "we're taught to speak in the collective terms" rather than promote ourselves. According to her, it is seen "in the workplace, it's not unique to athletes." Due to this socialization, female athletes may be "hesitant to quote sell themselves and think of themselves as a brand".

In personal branding, this could cause difficulties for female athletes because personal branding requires the individual to promote her or his uniqueness and be bold in leveraging one's personal brand. Previous management scholars claim the same issues face women in the workplace who must actively assert their personal strengths in order to gain promotion (Babcock & Laschever, 2003). If female athletes are socialized from a young age to not discuss their own worth, then they might find it to be a difficult task later on in their careers, and society may be reluctant to accept these women when they do voice their personal strengths and defy traditional gender norms (Rudman et al., 2010).

Furthermore, Agent 3 stated "to define an athlete's brand is to define those unguarded moments when they are truly who they are in front of a lot of people." In those unguarded moments for female athletes, they may do things which defy society's traditional gender norms and go against typical communal behaviors (Eagly, 1987). Intense celebrations or aggressive personalities are not defined as feminine communal behaviors. Thus, female athletes may face backlash if their brand identities on and off the field reflect these "bossy" or "bold" behaviors. This barrier in branding for female athletes contributes to the scholarship on the difficulties female athletes face when navigating their dual identities as athletes and women (Krane et al., 2004).

Beyond the bossy and bold labels, in her book *Throw Like a Girl*, Finch discusses how she and other female athletes have had to battle labels throughout their careers as athletic women. Finch stated:

All my life, I've had labels hung on me. People judge the exterior and assume

hey know what's on the inside. And it's not just me: I see the same thing

happening to my teammates and other female athletes…For some reason, people

want to stick us all in easy-to-label boxes: jock, brain, slacker, pretty girl (p. 53)

Similarly, Osterman acknowledged the labels society places on female athletes

when it comes to building a brand. She stated, "I don't want you to tell me I have nice

legs or that I have a nice smile. I want you to see how I play first." However, she does

think there is a perception of how female athletes should look and that endorsers look for

that first. According to Osterman, "it's just sometimes the perception of being, and I

don't want to say a sex object, but your appearance being more of what they look at.

Interestingly, Osterman spoke different about gender barriers depending on

which audience she was trying to reach. It appeared when speaking of one target

audience (i.e., fans), Osterman did not attribute gender to being a barrier. However,

when the target audience became potential sponsors, then she identified traditional

gender norms such as physical appearance and personality as barriers. Osterman believes

society's perception of female athletes impedes the athlete's ability to garner

endorsement deals from their brands. She stated endorsers are looking for the "blonde

hair, blue eyed, sweet and innocent looking girl." In her opinion, she believed if you do

not have that look then "you're kind of blocked."

In the film *Branded*, tennis legend Chris Everett supported this notion of

society's labels on female athletes and how those labels impede a female athlete's ability

to establish a strong brand via endorsement deals. Everett said, "Whether you like it or

not the feminine women athletes were the only ones who got the endorsements"

("Branded", 2013).

Based on these views that female athletes are not socialized to exude agentic behaviors, evidence from this case study extends social role theory (Eagly, 1987) into the context of female athlete branding. Arai et al. (2014) and the film *Branded* discussed the importance of athletes creating a persona. However, if female athletes are not socialized or encouraged as women to be bold on and off the field, to speak openly during interviews, to celebrate visibly, or display their competitiveness then their ability to create a distinctive identity is hindered. Additionally, the other part of building a brand is expressing one's brand's identity which would require female athletes to exude more agentic behaviors like assertiveness and self-promotion.

Lack of Consistent Visibility

According to Cassie, "visibility is probably the biggest issue" for female athletes in regards to building a brand. In her opinion, it is hard for female athletes to demand a younger following because "you can't turn on your TV to the women's sports network channel." Lauren agreed, stating "female athletes are obviously far less accessible." She went on to further illustrate how the lack of television coverage requires female athletes to work a lot harder to create their brand. While she suggests social media has allowed for more opportunities for female athletes to be visible, the lack of consistent mainstream media coverage limits female athletes' resources for using social media to build their brand.

Finch acknowledged the growing visibility of women's college sports, particularly softball, and how college players are now getting large amounts of media coverage. However, in her opinion, many of those college softball players are disappearing upon the completion of their college careers even when professional leagues exist. She discussed this lack of visibility and lack of consistency needed to help grow female athletes' brands:

> And now you see some of the college players who have the following and it's like 'ok how do we continue to build on that'…how do we keep her out there…Especially with all these successful college programs who have a following and it's the tradition and winning and I think the players get totally lost after college. The consistency isn't there.

> In Ghodeswar's (2008) brand identity framework, a brand's identity must be communicated consistently in order to deliver value. According to Parmentier and Fischer (2012), athlete brands need mainstream media in order to enhance their personal brand equity. However, women's sports and female athletes lack consistent media coverage (Antil et al., 2012).Without a consistent visibly platform, female athletes are unable to garner adequate brand awareness from mainstream audiences.

From this lack of visibility, female athletes are unable to create familiarity with fans meaning it is not as easy for them to build a brand relationship. These brand relationships help athletes deliver meaning and value to fans (de Chernatony, 1999). If female athletes are unable to create symbolic meaning and value via mainstream

visibility (i.e., television commercials and magazine ads), then it is important for them to find other ways to create brand relationships and deliver value to their audience.

Lack of Strong Brand Associations in Women's Sports

Both Finch and Osterman played professionally in the NPF but neither identified their NPF team as an additional association of their brand. In fact, only one of the participants mentioned the NPF or NPF team as a brand association of Jennie Finch or Cat Osterman. Cassie did associate Finch with the Chicago Bandits. Interestingly, the Chicago Bandits stadium's address is "27 Jennie Finch Way" (Chicagobandits.com, n.d.).

Finch's agent stated athletes need a platform to generate awareness for their brand, and right now the NPF is not commanding that platform. According to Agent 3, "it doesn't matter how interesting the player is or what their personality is or what their brand is" if the sport or league does not provide them a visible platform to showcase their brand.

According to Finch and Lauren, the women's professional sport leagues are not currently a visibility-enhancing brand association for female athletes. Finch specifically said, "We haven't been able to build a brand around the pro league." Furthermore, in softball, there is a divide between Team USA and the NPF which impedes softball player's ability to associate with a strong brand (Hays, 2013). As a result, Finch and Osterman are often associated more with Team USA than their NPF teams. Even Cassie stated the first association she contributes to Osterman is Team USA even though Osterman has not played an inning for Team USA since 2010.

Lauren referenced the small size of the league and how only a limited amount of players are actually able to capitalize on gaining visibility. She stated:

There's obviously tennis, the NPF, the WNBA, the professional soccer league, but there aren't that many athletes and then with those sports there's only a handful that actually have some sort of visibility within the sport or even outside of sport.

This inability to create strong league or team brands hinders a female athlete's ability to create additional associations needed for sport brands (Chadwick & Burton, 2008). In men's sports, sports teams like the New York Yankees and Dallas Cowboys have established themselves as strong brands (Couvelaere & Richelieu, 2005). In the case of Finch and Osterman, and arguably all team-sport female athletes, they do not have the luxury of associating with strong team brands in women's professional sports.

Relevant sport brands have the ability to transcend the sport context (Richelieu, 2004). Chadwick and Burton (2008) identified several factors which contribute towards building an athlete's brand including his or her team. The authors argue a player's team helps create additional associations for the player and the team's reputation and success help build the individual player's brand. However, for women's sports there appears to be a lack of strong, relevant brands in the women's sports community. Thus, female athletes do not have powerful brands in their leagues and teams to create additional associations needed to enhance their brand power. As the findings indicated earlier, strong sport-related brand associations help define an athlete's brand identity and help the athlete leverage her own brand equity.

Lack of Assistance or Guidance

Another barrier which was illuminated in participant interviews was that female athletes might not have help in managing their brand. Not having proper guidance or management could hinder a female athlete's ability to build a strong brand. One agent stated, "For someone to be able to translate success from the court into marketing deals, that takes management." She went on to say "the most successful female athletes from a marketing standpoint" all have agents.

Both Finch and Osterman have agents who have helped advise them on their brand, on targeting specific audiences, and on partnering with different sponsors and events. According to brand management literature, brand meanings arise from creating or managing brands through a process of co-creation by different stakeholders (Brown, Kozinest, & Sherry, 2003; Fournier, 1993; Kozinets, 2001; McAlexander, Schouten, & Koening, 2002; Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001; Muniz & Schau, 2007). Finch specifically credited her agent for helping her build and leverage her brand. She stated it is rare to have an agent and an agent who she can trust:

> I am incredibly blessed to have an amazing female agent who works extremely
> hard for me. I trust her to represent myself and my brand.

Finch stated she tried to help two former teammates leverage their brands by partnering with them on appearances and reaching out to her agent to help her teammates. She stated it is hard because "those big corporate sponsors" are not coming in to justify paying an agent a fee. Thus, female athletes "aren't getting the

representation they need because there's not money out there." Lauren, who represents herself, agreed:

> I still don't love talking about money...but I'd much rather take out the middle man. I'm not making enough money to be willing to give up 10-15% of that.

> According to Finch, athletes need representation or help in guiding their brands because "you have to have somebody pushing you out there." Further, it is difficult for athletes to manage both being an athlete and building a business. Finch said it is difficult to promote yourself. This difficulty could go back to the socialization of these female athletes as women and the ability to self-promote (Babcock & Laschever, 2003).

> Agent One stated some female athletes do not necessarily have the platform which requires an agent. If female athletes do not have large amounts of sponsorships coming in, then there may not be a need for any representation.

Breaking Barriers?

All three agents as well as Jennie Finch mentioned strategies they have used to overcome some of the barriers they witnessed in the context of branding for female athletes. Additionally, Finch, Lauren and Agent 3 made comments about their beliefs that society's perceptions about female athletes were changing and they were optimistic about the future of branding for female athletes.

Throughout the interviews, participants provided their perspectives on advice for building a brand. According to all of the agents interviewed, building a female athlete's brand is a "case-by-case basis" and depends on the athlete's personality and platform. Though there was no clear cut formula, many offered advice such as being aware that

you are a brand, being proactive and working hard to seek out opportunities, being a good networker, using social media and a strategic web presence, and having a business-mindset if you are an athlete who wants to build a brand. Agent one, who started her own branding and athlete management company, stated female athletes must be proactive and willing to put in the work to build their brand because as she suggested "it is very hard." According to her, female athletes have to be fully invested in the branding process and "willing to do take the time and energy to things" that are necessary and important in building a brand. She went on to say it is important that female athletes "consciously think of building their brand."

According to agent one, being proactive and working hard at building your brand included things like being willing to blog, broadcasting, coaching, or "whatever things are that can help them potentially make money and lead to more exposure." Also, she stated female athletes would need to be willing to network and meet people throughout the process. Finch agreed with this mindset saying it was important to be a "go-getter" and to "put yourself out there." According to Finch, female athletes should find their niche "embrace it, and let it shine."

Lauren believes society's thoughts are shifting towards becoming more open-minded and accepting of female athlete's diverse brands. When asked if physical attractiveness was a barrier for female athletes in building a brand, she stated, "I think it's a different barrier than it was five years ago." She referenced the national popularity of women's soccer players Abby Wambach and Megan Rapinoe who are both openly gay and who do not build their brands off physical attractiveness. Lauren stated:

But the great thing about that is that society is more willing to embrace the women from all walks of life and people from all walks of life. So I would imagine that there are still barriers but they have changed even in the last few years.

Similarly, Finch believes society's perceptions of femininity and beauty are changing which will serve to help the various brand identities of female athletes. According to Finch, it is "now cool to be a female athlete." She believes "it's now considered beautiful according to society to see a woman with muscles and strength." Lauren believes female athletes such as Wambach, Rapinoe, and Brittney Griner have built mainstream brands because they "have really stayed true to who they are. Their brands have exploded because they've been so authentic." Agent 3 would agree with this shift in society and this perhaps diminishing barrier:

I do think we're like a generation away from things being really different. We're finally post Title IX, so everyone that you know and a bunch of people that I know were born after Title IX happened and the expectations are different.

Overall, there appeared to be perceived barriers in the brand building process for female athletes which aligned with social role theory (Eagly, 1987). According to the findings, the interviewees believed the socialization of women and adherence to gender norms in behaviors such as assertiveness and self-promotion hindered a female athlete's ability to build and leverage her brand identity. Additionally, the findings provided evidence of barriers specific to branding such as strong brand associations and help in brand management. Interestingly, interviewees offered potential strategies and advice for

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overcoming the barriers which may exist for female athletes trying to build a strong

brand identity.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I will first provide a general discussion of the themes found in each research question as well as significant themes to the context of female athlete brand identity. Next, I will discuss academic and practical implications, limitations, and future research. Finally, I will provide a conclusion of this case study.

General Discussion

The purpose of this case study was to explore the brand identity creation process of female athletes and the barriers female athletes may face in the brand building process. This study helps fill a gap in sport management literature by looking internally at female athletes as brands and the creation of their brand identity. To date, the majority of athlete branding literature has examined the phenomenon through the consumer perspective (e.g., Arai et., 2013) and has solely focused on male athletes as subjects of the study (e.g., Parmentier & Fischer, 2012). Further, social role theory (Eagly, 1987) was extended to the context of female athlete branding to examine potential barriers which may impede a female athlete's ability to create a brand identity. Merging brand identity theory and social role theory in the context of female athlete branding helps provide evidence of specific strategies and barriers for female athletes in the brand building process.

The themes from the findings provide empirical support for Ghodeswar's (2008) brand identity framework in the human branding context (Thomson, 2006). Findings also support evidence specific to athlete branding such as the brand personality of

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athletes, the brand associations for athletes' brand identities, communication strategies specific to athletes like autograph signings, leveraging strategies like sporting equipment or sport clinics, and brand longevity as a human brand. Further, the findings illustrate themes that may be specific to female athletes such as the barriers which may impede or hinder female athletes' ability to build a strong brand.

The first research question assessed how female athletes define their personal brand identity. The objective of this research question was to examine female athletes from a human brand perspective and understand how and if female athletes think of their personal identity. By using Jennie Finch and Cat Osterman as cases for this investigation, the findings delineated specific themes in relation to the athlete's brand identity--core values, authenticity, personality, brand associations. These findings indicate the first step for these female athletes in creating a long-term brand was to know who you are to the core and to express that identity consistently. This aligns with Aaker's (1996) notion that the most essential step to building a successful brand is to define who the brand is and what the brand stands for. Then, effectively expressing that brand identity allows brands to differentiate and create strong associations in the minds of consumers. Based on the findings, the same is true for female athletes building a personal brand. Defining who you are and what you stand for equates to developing one's brand identity.

One of the most significant findings in relation to female athletes' brand identity is the brand personality of the athlete. According to Finch's agent, an athlete's brand is an extension of her or his personality. As part of the extended identity, brand personality

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is a key component of the evolution to iconic status (Wee & Ming, 2003). While both Finch and Osterman are strong brands in the softball community, Finch arguably has more iconic brand status and notoriety among the general audience. One of the biggest differences between the Jennie Finch brand and the Cat Osterman brand is their personality. Finch's personality was defined as approachable, inspirational and wholesome which creates emotional value. Thomson (2006) found consumers develop strong attachments for human brands that provide a sense of closeness and an emotional connection. Thus, it appears Finch's personality has helped her create symbolic meaning for her brand identity which provides her fans emotional value. According to Arai et al.'s (2013) definition of athlete brands, athlete brands must create symbolic meaning based on their personal identity and attributes.

Another distinguishing difference between Finch and Osterman's personalities was Finch was business-minded whereas Osterman said she was not very business-minded. For female athletes who want to build a brand, one agent stated they should consider themselves "small business owners." Jennie Finch has built a business from her brand by being strategic through the branding process and also by working hard. Her agent said Finch makes it look easy [branding] but it is not that easy. Thus, if female athletes do choose to use their brand to make money off the field, then the agents and athletes in this case suggest thinking of yourself as your own small business and fully invest in the branding process. Perhaps, a large reason why Finch has been able to generate revenue off of her brand is because of her business-mindset.

The second research question sought to understand the brand building strategies Finch and Osterman used to express their brand identity. The objective for this question was to apply a traditional branding theory to female athlete brands in order to examine strategies specific to female athletes. Guided by Ghodeswar's (2008) brand identity framework, the cases of Jennie Finch and Cat Osterman provided empirical support for using Ghodeswar's framework in the context of human branding. Findings suggested both athletes and their management actively and consciously positioned their brands, communicated their brand's message, and leveraged their brand in accordance with their personal brand identities. The cases of Finch and Osterman supported brand identity literature, in that it is important for athlete brands to know their audience, differentiate their brand through positioning strategies, communicate their brand consistently, and leverage their brand identity by creating value for their fans off the field.

Within these three elements there were strategies that might be specific to athlete brands including being selective in endorsement deals and the "autograph effect". Both Finch and Osterman stated they were selective in endorsement deals they aligned with and had actually turned down lucrative offers if they did not match their personal brand identity or speak to their target audience. Thus, it appears important for long-term brand value to be strategic in the endorsement deals with which athletes associate. The "autograph effect" showed the value of human brand interaction with consumers. As Thomson (2006) suggested, fans development attachments with human brands that they can relate to and with whom they develop an emotional connection. The "autograph effect" helps explain this human-to-human interaction between athletes and their fans.

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This could be in the form of autographs or even off-field endeavors such as the community work Osterman does with RBI Austin. In regards to female athletes, this "autograph effect" may have larger implications since female athletes are not as visible in mainstream media and fans have limited means for developing these attachments with female athletes.

This case study provided evidence for additional themes in the athlete brand building process including creating a USP and brand longevity. Based on the way their brands were leveraged and the symbolic meanings each have created, it appears Finch's brand identity is more distinct than Osterman's. Evidence provided support that Finch has created her own USP and delivered that slogan through her "Dream and Believe" slogan. Consistent communication of her USP has allowed her to deliver an inspirational value to her audience. Further, the findings from the study demonstrated how both these athletes, who were thrust into stardom during the 2004 Olympics, have evolved throughout their careers and endured brand longevity. Finch has retired from softball but remains a relevant brand based on staying true to her core and adapting her brand through her life transformations as an athlete to a mom. In addition, consistent delivery of her USP and her business-minded leveraging strategies have enabled her to create revenue from her brand identity well beyond her sport career. Currently, Osterman is still competing in the NPF, but analysis showed she is consciously starting to consider the transformation of her brand after her playing career. Brand longevity may be critical for female athletes who have limited opportunities for long-term, lucrative playing careers.

One significant strategy for female athletes may be social media. According to both Finch and Osterman, they actively communicate their brand identities on Twitter and consciously think about who is viewing their brand-driven content. According to Marwick and Boyd (2010), microblogging sites like Twitter allow users to consciously and strategically present their brand's identity to imagined audiences as well as network with others. Pegoraro and Jinnah (2012) argue Twitter is a great platform for athletes to extend their brand identity and leverage their social media brand equity. The authors suggest athletes should use social media to differentiate themselves while connecting with fans in order to grow their personal brands. Thus, using social media platforms is an effective branding strategy for female athletes if they position their brand identity strategically through their social media posts.

The third research question sought to examine potential barriers that might hinder female athletes' ability to create a strong brand. The objective for this research question was to examine the role of gender in athlete branding and to illuminate participants' perceptions of barriers they have faced while being a female athlete creating a brand or being an agent who is helping female athletes create a brand. Based on the findings, it is evident that barriers exist for female athletes when it comes to building a brand. Both the athletes and agents cited differences between male and female athletes claiming most male athletes did not need to build a brand because they could make enough money from their playing salaries. Interviewees also believed male athletes could build a brand solely off their athletic success whereas female athletes had to build their brand off more than just athletic success.

There was evidence of barriers for female athletes brand building strategies based on their social role as women. Creating a brand identity requires the female athlete to effectively express her identity through brand positioning and communication strategies (Ghodeswar, 2008). Due to the socialization of women and the expectations of women to exude communal behaviors (Eagly, 1987), female athletes may not be comfortable being bold or proactive in expressing their identity. As suggested by the findings, this barrier transcends sports and is a societal issue that women are not encouraged to be bold or bossy, both qualities needed for personal branding. Additionally, findings show female athletes are not encouraged to demonstrate their personalities via celebrations on the field or during interviews, which inhibits their ability to create a distinctive persona, or brand.

Finch often referenced her femininity claiming she embraced her feminine side and portrayed this through pink equipment and hair accessories. According to Eagly (1987), Finch's idea of femininity is in accordance with the expected gender norms and behaviors females are expected to exude. Though Finch claimed she was authentic, it could be argued her view of authenticity is socially constructed (). Thus, it appeared Finch's brand as a feminine role model is influenced by assumptions and interpretations of gendered discourse (Acker, 1992; Shaw & Hoeber, 2003). The way Finch's brand was leveraged through equipment and apparel resembled the assumptions of feminine gender roles and the assumed meanings of what it is to be a woman (Alvesson & Billing, 1997). Sport management researchers demonstrate gendered discourse exists in various contexts of sport and this case study shows female athlete's perceptions of femininity and

gendered norms is influenced by their own taken for granted assumptions. Though Finch did not cite this as a barrier, the idea of labels and perceptions of gender roles in building a brand are a barrier for other female athletes trying to build a brand off their unique identity and associations.

Traditionally, individual sport female athletes have built more visible brands than team sport female athletes (e.g., Antil et al., 2012). Beyond their lack of consistent visibility, the barrier of the lack of strong brand associations in women's team sports provides more insight as to why female team-sport athletes have not been able to build as strong of brands. As this case study suggests, sport-related brand associations represent a large part of the female athlete's brand identity. For example, Finch and Osterman both associated themselves with softball but their brand image is often associated with the Olympics and Team USA rather than their NPF teams. Professional sport teams can build a strong brand based on attributes like a winning tradition, intense rivalry, longevity and tradition, powerful fans, entertainment experience and rituals at games (Richelieu & Pons, 2006). According to the Richelieu and Pons, sport teams can leverage brand equity by positioning themselves as 'small-town captures a broader appeal' (i.e., Green Bay Packers) or attaching themselves to a historic story or stadium (i.e., Chicago Cubs). When sport teams are able to generate their own brand equity, athletes of the team are able to associate their own brand with the symbolic meanings attached to their respective teams (Chadwick & Burton, 2008). However, in the case of women's professional sports, sport teams have yet to develop their brand equity which inhibits team-sport female athletes' ability to attach themselves to strong sport team

brands. Ultimately, the lack of strong sport brand associations in women's sports

impedes a female athlete's ability to build a strong brand identity.

The last theme within the barriers suggested potential strategies for overcoming

barriers female athletes may face in the brand building process. This finding is

significant in that these suggestions stem from current female athletes and agents in

charge of managing female athletes' brands. Though potential barriers exist such as

assumptions of femininity and the inability to build a brand off performance, the

interviewees suggest there are steps female athletes can take to overcome these barriers

such as being a good networker and taking advantage of opportunities that are granted to

athletes during their sport careers (i.e., events, speaking engagements). Further, the

processes outlined by Ghodeswar's (2008) model demonstrate female athletes can

develop unique strategies which align with their own brand identity, develop positioning

strategies to differentiate themselves, communicate their brand to the appropriate target

audience, and ultimately leverage their brand off the field based on the before mentioned

strategies. As suggested by the agents, it is important female athletes understand they are

a brand in order to develop unique strategies and build long term equity off the field.

Implications

This case study provides scholarly and practical implications for sport

management and female athlete branding. The findings from this study provide

empirical support for Ghodeswar's (2008) brand identity framework in the human

branding context (Thomson, 2006). By using two female athletes, Jennie Finch and Cat

Osterman, as case studies, there is evidence that brand identity theory is a viable

framework for examining how human brands such as athletes can build a brand identity and leverage their brand equity. This case provided evidence that these two athletes have established a brand identity, positioned and communicated their brand's message based on their identity, and leveraged their brands' equity off the field. Thus, Ghodeswar's (2008) framework can be used as a guideline to help scholars, sport managers, athletes, and athletes' management teams build a brand identity and position the brand to their target audience.

For scholars, this case contributes to the growing research areas of human branding and athlete branding. By looking internally at female athletes as human brands, this case provides initial evidence into the strategic brand building process of human brands. In the context of athlete branding, this study provides initial evidence of themes specific to building brand identity for female athletes. Finch and Osterman both used their style of play and associations with their sport teams to position their brand identities. Additionally, both used sport-related tangible attributes such as position-specific logos to differentiate their brands. Athlete specific communication strategies included endorsements and sporting events. Finally, both leveraged their brand equity by using equipment products, sport clinics, and co-branding opportunities with sport-related brands. Applying a brand identity perspective to athlete brands, demonstrated how an athlete's brand identity plays a critical role in the branding process. Ultimately, the athlete, as the brand owner, has control of the brand image she or he wants consumers to see.

Though Finch and Osterman did not relish the idea of being considered a brand, there are numerous practical benefits for considering female athletes as a brand and using their unique brand identity to create long-term opportunities off the field. Based on the potential barriers that emerged from this study, creating these long-term opportunities is critical for female athletes. The benefits from building a personal brand while playing are the ability for an athlete to leverage one's successful athletic career through off-field endeavors. According to Rein, Kotler, and Shields (2006), the advantage of viewing athletes as brands is that athletes have "the potential to enter into a variety of sectors and use his or her sports career as a platform for other endeavors." Thus, for female athletes, understanding what makes up their brand identity and understanding how to express that identity can help them take advantage of their on-field platform to create opportunities off the field.

This study provides female athletes a guideline for building a successful brand that can transcend their sport career. Based on the findings and literature, understanding an athlete's brand identity is the first step to building a brand. Beyond just knowing who you are, it is also critical to effectively express your brand's identity. Finch has consistently expressed her brand throughout her brand relationships which has contributed towards her brand longevity whereas Osterman seems to just now be expressing her identity off the field. Expressing one's brand identity is achieved through well-positioned branding strategies (Aaker, 1996; Ghodeswar, 2008). These strategies should reflect who the athlete is on and off the field, what the athlete stands for, and the unique brand associations of the athlete. By maintaining a consistent message through

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their positioning and communication strategies, female athletes can leverage their brands off the field creating opportunities for themselves to generate additional revenue and career opportunities.

For athlete brands, it may be critical to develop a USP based on their brand identity and sport platform. Temporal (2000) suggests branding efforts should focus on adding psychological values to their products and services in the form of emotional associations and intangible benefits. For example, Finch has integrated her brand's USP---her core values, personality, desire to be a role model, and athletic performance--into her brand's products (i.e., "Dream and Believe" headbands, pink Mizuno softball equipment) and services (Jennie Finch Softball Camps). Her slogan 'Dream and Believe' encapsulates her USP and has helped her differentiate her brand based on an emotional value. Adding emotional significance to a brand's functional value creates a substantial source of value for the brand (Sherrington, 2003). Developing a USP based on emotional value could potentially be an opportunity for female athletes to use their communal qualities to attach emotional associations and generate psychological value to their brand.

Understanding a female athlete's unique brand identity will not only enable the athlete to leverage her brand, but also attract the right sponsors. According to the documentary film "Branded", female athletes may be more compliant in accepting options they get for building their brand (i.e., endorsement deals). Evidence from this study and the branding process of Jennie Finch and Cat Osterman suggests this is not a smart business decision for female athletes trying to leverage their personal brands. Both

Finch and Osterman stated they have turned down endorsement deals and appearances which did not align with their brand identity. Though they sacrificed money and turned down lucrative offers, in the long run these decisions benefitted them as the associations they did make cemented their identities and resonated with their specific target audiences. Thus, when it comes to endorsement deals and off-field opportunities for female athletes, understanding their own brand identity is critical for their brand longevity. Developing an established brand identity can help the athlete, their management, and sponsors create strategic branding strategies in co-branding opportunities.

Another implication for female athletes and members of the women's sports community is to understand the "autograph effect." According to de Chernatony (1999), brands develop symbolic meaning through advertising campaigns and through customers' interactions with the brand. The problem with female athlete brands is female athletes receive less visibility through mainstream media outlets (e.g., Antil et al., 2012). Thus, it is important to understand how female athletes can develop symbolic meanings through other interactions with fans. Based on findings from this study, potential strategies for gaining this interaction include being willing to sign autographs and interacting with fans after games. Other strategies could be sport-specific clinics taught by the athlete and other consistent community work. This enables fans to interact with the athlete's brand and develop strong meanings and attachments through the brand relationship (de Chernatony, 1999).

In accordance with social role theory (Eagly, 1987), the cases in this study attributed the socialization of women as a potential hindrance for female athletes in the brand building process. Personal branding requires an individual to self-promote and discuss their own self-worth, two behaviors society deems as masculine or agentic (Eagly, 1987). Female athletes and their management teams must embrace the fact that, as a woman, the athlete may not be comfortable or experienced in demonstrating her personality or promoting herself. Furthermore, it was noted that female athletes may not have help or guidance when it comes to building a brand which further accentuates their inability to self-promote. Proper education or guidance might be needed for female athletes before they reach professional careers.

Limitations

As the case in all research, several limitations existed which may affect the findings. First, the participants in this case study may have withheld information or failed to fully disclose information pertaining to their own brand and branding strategies. Secondly, the majority of one-on-one interviews were conducted via telephone rather than in-person which means I was not able to capture participants' nonverbal communication. According to Creswell (2012), this data collection method is viable when in-person access is not possible; however, it could limit the depth of the information obtained. Third, the interpretations of the findings and drawn conclusions could be influenced by my own biases and background (Miles & Huberman, 1994). This limitation was mitigated by discussing the codes and findings with my committee chair as well as using a peer debriefer who specializes in athlete branding. In addition,

findings and initial themes were discussed with Finch and Osterman to make sure the data was accurately collected. Neither Finch nor Osterman suggested any changes or additions. Finally, the timeframe of this study and the diversity of the interview stakeholders may have affected the findings. However, I tried to use members of the softball community who had a thorough understanding of Jennie Finch and Cat Osterman and members who represented the various levels of the softball community (i.e., college, professional, Team USA).

Future Research

There are several directions for future research that emerged from this qualitative case study. While this study thoroughly examined the brands of these two female athletes, future studies should apply similar theoretical frameworks and research designs to examine the brand identity creation of female athletes from various individual and team sports. Based on social role theory and the limited exposure of female athletes and women's sports, understanding athlete branding specific to female athletes is critical. By collectively looking at female athletes from a range of sports, scholars and practitioners can begin to understand and develop strategies for overcoming barriers and educating female athletes on how to use their sport platform to leverage their personal brands. Further, scholars can examine the strategies specific to overcoming the perceived barriers female athletes face when building a brand identity. In result, these women can create opportunities for themselves off the field or court that resemble their personal brand identity and help create long-term career opportunities.

Future research should further identify specific target audiences for female athletes. Few researchers have examined the motives and behaviors of female athletes' audiences (e.g., Funk, Ridinger, & Moorman, 2004). From a brand identity perspective, evidence from this case supports the notion that female athletes can build successful brands by attaching value to their USP and brand positioning strategies. Identifying the emotional value fans desire in women's sports can help scholars, sport managers, and athletes position female athlete's USPs. Additional consumer behavior research is warranted in women's sports to develop a more thorough understanding of the motives, behaviors, and values of women's sports fans.

The cases in this study used different strategies to position, communicate, and leverage their brand identities. Though Finch and Osterman had different identities, each used her core values, intangible and tangible attributes, brand associations, and style of play to position her brand. Packaged together this equated to their individual USP. They used various means for communicating their USP including endorsements/sponsorships, social media, events/appearances, and community involvement. To leverage their brand, these two athletes used equipment, apparel, clinics, charitable organizations, co-branding opportunities, and mainstream opportunities. Future studies should further investigate these strategies to identify elements specific to athletes as well as elements that are specific to male or female athletes.

Additionally, future research could examine female athlete branding from a longitudinal perspective. Both Finch and Osterman stated their brands have evolved through their careers. Now retired, Finch saw her brand evolve from Olympic pitcher to

mom. Osterman, who initially announced her retirement following the 2013 NPF season but then decided to keep playing (Hays, 2013), is nearing the end of her playing career. A future case study could explore Osterman's branding strategies and compare them to her strategies found in this case study. Illuminating the similarities and differences could provide further insight into the long-term brand building process for female athletes.

Future studies should further examine the barriers female athletes face in the brand building process. Evidence from this case study supports female athletes face the negotiation of their dual identity (Krane, Ross, Miller, Rowse, Ganoie, Andrzejczyk, & Lucas, 2010) in the personal branding process. This is significant because in order to build a successful brand, it is critical for female athletes to possess characteristics and behaviors not deemed appropriate (Eagly, 1987). The theme breaking barriers suggested society's views may be changing. Further insight is needed to fully understand female athletes' perceptions of gender norms and how they navigate their identity through the personal branding process.

Conclusion

Branding scholars suggest branding is a long-term mindset (Ghodeswar, 2008). By using brand identity theory to explore the brand identity creation of Jennie Finch and Cat Osterman, findings from this case study provide evidence for defining and establishing an athlete's brand identity that can generate long-term value during and after their sport careers. Jennie Finch has built a brand driven mindset that has evolved from an inspirational softball pitcher to an inspirational mom. Through her brand's evolvement, Finch's core identity has remained as "the central, timeless essence" of her

brand (Ghodeswar, 2008, p. 5). She has transcended the sport of softball into a mainstream brand by establishing a clear brand identity, strategically positioning her brand, and leveraging brand equity off the field through endeavors which contribute emotional value to her brand. Brands are able to maintain relevance if they are proactive, innovative, and maintain consistent communication of their brand identity (Gouws & Rheede van Oudtshoorn, 2011). Some of the interviewees suggested Finch's physical attractiveness helped provide a platform and larger audience, but Finch never mentioned her looks as part of her brand identity. Instead, she focused her strategies on integrating her feminine identity with her competitor identity on tangible attributes like her pink softball equipment and book *Throw Like a Girl*. Based on the case study, Finch is proactive in her branding approach, she is innovative in how she has created additional associations off the field (i.e., Celebrity Apprentice, the NYC Marathon), and she consistently communicates her brand message through social media, appearances, and selective endorsements.

Furthermore, Finch created a USP that creates emotional value for her audience and makes her brand identity distinctive and memorable. She integrates her USP through her branded products (equipment and hair accessories), services (clinics), and "Dream and Believe" slogan. Her wholesome and approachable personality allows fans to relate to her and believe in her brand (Wee & Ming, 2003). As Lauren Lauren stated, Jennie Finch lives her brand and fans are not disappointed when they meet her. By creating emotional value that resonates with her fans and approaching the branding process with a business-mindset, Finch has leveraged her brand identity through lucrative off-field

endeavors like her Jennie Finch Softball Clinics, the Finch Windmill, and "Dream and Believe" headbands. Thus, her brand identity reflects in her business strategies (Aaker & Joachimsthaler, 2000) which have allowed her to capitalize on her sport success and generate long-term revenue.

In contrast to Finch, Osterman stated she is not very business-like and not as proactive in leveraging her brand equity off the field. Osterman often referred to her brand as a competitor and said she wanted to be remembered for her performance on the field. The softball players interviewed and internet documents associate Cat Osterman with being a dominant pitcher. Her competitive core remains consistent off the field as she targets more competitive softball players as a collegiate coach and in her social media presence. She credits her shy personality and appreciation for down tidme as reasons for turning down endorsements, speaking engagements, and other opportunities that might lead to more exposure. Osterman liked her partnership with Under Armour because its brand identity aligned with her edgy and fierce identity, and she liked the partnership because there were minimal off-field obligations. She has also used her partnership with Wilson-DeMarini to co-create the Cat Osterman Series softball glove, and she does use social media to communicate her brand identity. However, her brand's longevity remains in the sport and it is evident Osterman's brand identity plays a critical role in how her brand has been leveraged off the field.

It would appear Osterman's USP is mostly based on her athletic performance. In her own words, Osterman said she has used her brand minimally and focused more on her playing career. As she is nearing the end of her softball career, Osterman was aware

her brand would need to transform after her playing career. Recently, Osterman has integrated one of her strong brand associations (the city of Austin) with her passions for coaching and softball. Currently, she is the assistant softball coach at St. Edwards University in Austin and has taken an active role in RBI Austin's softball initiative. Osterman also still plays professionally for the USSSA Pride. The case did not provide much evidence that others associate Osterman with these off-field endeavors (only Lauren acknowledged Osterman's association with coaching), but as Osterman stated these are recent endeavors she has pursued.

Perhaps, the most significant takeaway from Cat Osterman's brand identity and branding strategies is that some female athletes may not desire a marketable, or business-driven brand. While Osterman's performance-driven brand could be labeled as a barrier, from Osterman's perspective, the most important thing to her right now is competing on the field. That is how she measures success. Furthermore, she views her branding efforts as successful for the amount of effort she has put into it. As Agent 3 stated, there are two options for female athletes (a) think of yourself as a small business and work hard off the field at leveraging your brand, or (b) focus entirely on your sport and find another means to subsidize your playing monies. After analyzing the brand building strategies of Jennie Finch and Cat Osterman, it appears Finch has taken the small business route whereas Osterman has taken the sport-focused route.

Finally, it was the goal of this dissertation to specifically look at the brand identity creation of female athletes. By interviewing current professional athletes and female agents, this case study provides evidence that barriers exist for female athletes in

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the brand building process. Understanding these barriers and educating female athletes on strategies to package, communicate, and leverage their unique brand identities can help female athletes overcome these barriers. As mentioned before, using brand identity frameworks can help guide athletes in that branding process by identifying strategies needed to position, communicate, and leverage their individual brand identity.

It is my hope that evidence from this case study helps grow the women's sports community by providing female athletes evidence of strategies for overcoming existing barriers.

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APPENDIX A

INFORMATION SHEET

Project Title: Exploring the Brand Identity Creation for Female Athletes: The case of Jennie Finch and Cat Osterman

You are invited to take part in a research study being conducted by Gregg Bennett and Jami Lobpries researchers from Texas A&M University. **The information in this form is provided to help you decide whether or not to take part. If you decide you do not want to participate, there will be no penalty to you, and you will not lose any benefits you normally would have.**

Why Is This Study Being Done?
The purpose of this study is to examine the brand identity creation practices and strategies of elite female athletes, particularly two female athletes from a women's team sport, Jennie Finch and Cat Osterman.

Why Am I Being Asked To Be In This Study?
You are being asked to be in this study because you are a current female athlete who has been successful in building a personal brand, you are an agent or athlete representative who helps female athletes create and manage their personal brands, or you have an awareness and understanding of the brands of Jennie Finch and Cat Osterman.

How Many People Will Be Asked To Be In This Study?
A maximum of 30 people (participants) will be invited to participate in this study.

What Are the Alternatives to being in this study?
The alternative to being in the study is not to participate.

What Will I Be Asked To Do In This Study?
You will be asked to participate in a personal interview lasting no longer than 90 minutes with the researchers examining your efforts in building a personal brand.

The interviews will be audio recorded for research purposes only. In order to participate in the study, you must consent to audio recordings in order for the researchers to obtain the most accurate data. Failure to consent to audio recordings will result in not participating in the study.

Are There Any Risks To Me?
The things that you will be doing are no more risks than you would come across in everyday life. Although the researchers have tried to avoid risks, you may feel that some questions/procedures that are asked of you will be stressful or upsetting. You do not have to answer anything you do not want to.

Are There Any Benefits To Me?
The direct benefit to you by being in this study is the increased understanding of creating a brand identity and strategies used to help female athletes leverage their personal brand.

Will There Be Any Costs To Me?
Aside from your time, there are no costs for taking part in the study.

Will I Be Paid To Be In This Study?
You will not be paid for being in this study.

Will Information From This Study Be Kept Private?
The records of this study will be kept private. The only identifier linking you to this study will be your name. Data from the surveys will be stored on the personal computer of the primary researcher.

Information about you will be kept confidential to the extent permitted or required by law. People who have access to your information include the Principal Investigator and research study personnel. Representatives of regulatory agencies such as the Office of Human Research Protections (OHRP) and entities such as the Texas A&M University Human Subjects Protection Program may access your records to make sure the study is being run correctly and that information is collected properly. Information about you and related to this study will be kept confidential to the extent permitted or required by law.

Who may I Contact for More Information?
You may contact the Principal Investigator, Jami Lobpries, to tell her about a concern or complaint about this research at jlobpries@hlkn.tamu.edu
 You may also contact Dr. Gregg Bennett at gbennett@tamu.edu.

For questions about your rights as a research participant; or if you have questions, complaints, or concerns about the research, you may call the Texas A&M University Human Subjects Protection Program office at (979) 458-4067 or toll free at (855) 795-8636 or irb@tamu.edu.

What if I Change My Mind About Participating?
This research is voluntary and you have the choice whether or not to be in this research study. You may decide to not begin or to stop participating at any time. If you choose not to be in this study or stop being in the study, there will be no effects or consequences.

By participating in the survey you are giving permission for the investigator to use your responses for research purposes.

Thank you.

Jami Lobpries

CASE STUDIES: JENNIE FINCH AND CAT OSTERMAN

Battle of the Brands	Jennie Finch	Cat Osterman
Sport/Position	Softball Pitcher	Softball Pitcher
Age	33	31
College	University of Arizona	University of Texas
Olympics	2004, 2008	2004, 2008
Professional	Chicago Bandits 2005 to 2010	USSSA Pride 2009 to Current
Major Endorsements	Mizuno, Chobani Yogurt, Timex, Phiten, Diamond Nation, Team Snap	Under Armour, Wilson Sporting Goods, Longhorn Bar
Twitter Followers	133. 5K	37.9K
Facebook	325,000	54,189
Instagram	224,000	13,000

APPENDIX C

PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILES

Participant	Agency	Athletes
Agent 1	Stanton & CO	Action Sports
Agent 2	Wasserman Media Group	WNBA players
Agent 3	Octagon	Jennie Finch, male and female athletes

Participant	Alma Mater	Current Softball Team	Affiliation to Finch and Osterman
Taylor	University of Texas	Team USA	Played at Osterman's alma mater
Lauren	Stanford University	Pennsylvania Rebellion (NPF)	Former Olympic teammate of Finch and Osterman, former NPF teammate of Osterman
Danielle	University of North Carolina	Head coach Redlands University	Former NPF teammate of Osterman
Cassie	Texas A&M University	USSSA Pride	Former camper of Osterman's, current NPF teammate

INTERVIEW GUIDE: JENNIE FINCH AND CAT OSTERMAN

Exploring the Brand Identity Creation of Female Athletes
Interview Guide: Female Athletes

--Are you ok with me using your real name in the publication of this data?

Definition of a Brand: A brand is your identity, who you are to the core. Brands contain tangible elements (logo, name, image) and intangible elements (core values, personality).

Questions
1. In your opinion, who is the most successful female athlete brand and why?
2. Do you consider yourself a brand?

RQ 1: How do female athletes define their personal brand?

1. Describe your personal brand. What meanings do you want attached to your name? What is unique or different about your brand? (identity)
2. Explain the process of when you first started considering yourself a brand.
3. What core values make up your brand? What core values do you want people to associate with you? (core identity)
4. How would you define your personality? How has that impacted your personal brand throughout your career? (extended identity)
5. Part of your brand encompasses tangible elements like your logo or image, how often do you think about your image? How important is your image?
6. As an athlete, what are some of the external things you associate your personal brand with (i.e. your university, your team, your hometown, your ethnicity)?
7. What type of advice have you received when building your brand? From who?
8. Are there any athlete brands you try to emulate?

RQ 2: What are the current brand building strategies being employed by elite female athletes and their management teams or agents to leverage their brand?

1. When people hear [YOUR NAME], what do you want them to think? (positioning)
2. A target audience is a group of specific people, whether it is your fans, followers, or even potential employers. Explain who your target audience is and how you try to reach your target audience. Who helps you identify that audience? (communicating)
3. Describe your personal branding strategies online. How has social media helped? What other ways do you communicate your brand to the public?(communicating)

4. How do you evaluate the success of your personal branding efforts? (For example: What strategies have worked best at reaching your audience?) (delivering brand performance)
5. Describe the process in which you evaluate potential endorsement deals. Do you think about the fit between the endorsers brand and your brand? (leveraging)
6. What off-field endeavors have you pursued that you think align well with your brand? (leveraging). Any other extensions, such as camps, or personal merchandise, or charitable foundations, or social causes?

RQ 3: What barriers exist for elite female athletes in regards to the creation of a personal brand?

1. Describe any barriers you have faced when building your personal brand and how you overcame those barriers.
2. What types of differences have you seen in building your brand compared to how other athletes have built their brand?
3. Do you feel like it is more difficult for female athletes to brand themselves vs. male athletes? Why?
4. Do you ever feel like it is difficult as a female to discuss your personal brand and communicate your worth to your audience?
5. What advice would you give to other female athletes in terms of building their personal brand?

APPENDIX E

INTERVIEW GUIDE: ATHLETES AND AGENTS

Exploring the Brand Identity Creation of Female Athletes
Interview Guide: Female Athletes

Definition of a Brand: A brand is your identity, who you are to the core. Brands contain tangible elements (logo, name, image) and intangible elements (core values, personality).

Questions
   3. In your opinion, who is the most successful female athlete brand and why?
   4. Do you consider yourself a brand?

RQ 1: How do female athletes define their personal brand?

   9. How would you describe the brands of Jennie Finch and Cat Osterman. What meanings do you attached to their name? What is unique or different about their brand? (identity)
   10. What core values do you think make up their brand?
   11. How would you define their personality? How do you think that has impacted their personal brand throughout their career? (extended identity)
   12. What are some of the external things you associate with their brands?

RQ 2: What are the current brand building strategies being employed by elite female athletes and their management teams or agents to leverage their brand?

   7. When you hear [YOUR NAME], what do you think? (positioning)
   8. A target audience is a group of specific people, whether it is your fans, followers, or even potential employers. Who would you define as Jennie and Cat's target audience? (communicating)
   9. Describe how you think they communicate their brand to the public?(communicating)
   10. What off-field endeavors do you align with their brand? (leveraging). Any other extensions, such as camps, or personal merchandise, or charitable foundations, or social causes?

RQ 3: What barriers exist for elite female athletes in regards to the creation of a personal brand?

   6. Describe any barriers you have faced when building your personal brand and how you overcame those barriers.

7. What types of differences have you seen in building your brand compared to how other athletes have built their brand?
8. Do you feel like it is more difficult for female athletes to brand themselves vs. male athletes? Why?
9. Do you ever feel like it is difficult as a female to discuss your personal brand and communicate your worth to your audience?
10. What advice would you give to other female athletes in terms of building their personal brand?