

**MORE THAN A PRETTY GIRL: RESISTANCE, COMMUNITY AND GROUP
IDENTITY AMONG FEMALE TRIATHLETES**

A Thesis

by

MEGAN KELLY CRONAN

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
MASTER OF SCIENCE

December 2005

Major Subject: Recreation, Park and Tourism Sciences

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ABSTRACT

More Than a Pretty Girl: Resistance, Community and Group Identity Among Female
Triathletes. (December 2005)

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This study examines women's use of leisure as politics, especially as related to leisure as resistance, leisure and social worlds, and women's body image. Interviews were conducted with fifteen participants and coaches in two all-women's triathlon training groups in Austin, Texas. Both training groups prepared women for participation in the Austin Danskin Triathlon. Qualitative methods, grounded theory and constant comparison guided the interviewing and data analysis process. It was determined that Danskin trainees formed a social world which allowed them to redefine their bodies and redefine the tenets of organized sport. This finding centered around three major areas: initial involvement, community building and resistance. Most participants became involved initially for social reasons even though they often were out of shape or had not previously participated in athletics. Several participants experienced barriers to involvement commonly discussed in gender leisure studies including weight issues, "ethic of care" concerns and fear of not deserving leisure time. During participation in their training programs, the majority of trainees formed a community with their fellow participants which provided them with a safe place and a support structure. As a result,

many Austin Danskin triathlon trainees were able to communally resist cultural and societal norms surrounding women's bodies and competitive athletics. As a group, trainees redefined the way women should look and placed function above form. Furthermore, they reclaimed sport from the male norm and instead demanded that it go beyond bigger, better, faster or stronger and instead focus on community, support and teamwork. The results of this study urge leisure providers to create programs that appeal to the whole person – not just the physical.

As a result of the data, several hypotheses may be suggested for future study: Do women's only recreation programs provide a crucial link between social world formation and leisure as resistance? What other programs may produce similar results and why?

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

How good does a female athlete have to be before we just call her an athlete?
- Unknown

Taught from infancy that beauty is woman's scepter, the mind shapes itself to the body, and roaming round its gilt cage, only seeks to adorn its prison.
-Wollstonecraft, 1792

Sport has often served different cultures in different ways in terms of providing a venue for maintaining, shaping, controlling, and transmitting images of the body as well as moral values (Frank, 1990). For example, Grecian women were not allowed to watch or participate in the Olympic Games because it was considered a masculine pursuit (Twin, 1979). However, the women of Sparta were trained physically so that they would “bear great warriors for the state” (Twin, 1979, p xvi). Two different cultures and two different ways of using sport to reinforce cultural norms through the control of the female body.

The body in sport, and in particular the female body in sport, has therefore been a location for debate about the “changing nature of ideology, power, social structures, and cultural systems” of society throughout history (Hong, 2001, p 2). Some would even argue that, “A history of women’s sports is a history of women’s struggle to free their bodies over the past centuries” (Mangan & Hong, 2001, p 2).

This thesis follows the style and format of the *Journal of Leisure Research*.

Modern feminist leisure researchers, for example, suggest that as sport is often pursued in one's free time, it represents women's power and control over their own lives (Shaw, 2001). Women's leisure is, they in fact argue, a prime arena for political expression as it is an aspect of social life in which power is brokered, and norms and ideologies are questioned (Shaw, 2001). In other words, because leisure often becomes a microcosm of greater society, and yet is usually chosen by free will, it becomes a unique venue in which to examine and compare gender and therefore power relations. Indeed, if one feels as structuralists do that societal ideologies function to make power inequities seem natural and normal, then the history of women in sports would provide a fertile ground for examining such normalizing ideologies and their changes over time (Shaw, 2001).

Similarly, historians have found that "Involvement in sport has [often] symbolized women's desire for change," (Magnan & Hong, 2001, p 2) and that throughout history women have used sport as an instrument of liberation and a method of emancipation (Hong, 2001). Not only does sport allow for the liberation of women in terms of control and choice, but also in terms of their very bodies.

The field of recreation, parks and tourism began to study the relationship between gender and sport as the study of women's leisure became its own scholarly pursuit in the 1980's (Henderson, 1996). However, from the 1980's until the 1990's, women's leisure research was examined under the assumption that "one size fits all," in other words it was assumed that all women recreated and reacted to their recreation in similar ways (Henderson, 1996, p. 139).

The standards within the field for studying women's leisure began to change, however, as researchers learned that the use of qualitative *and* quantitative methods as well as varied approaches for understanding varied populations of women were necessary and provided more refined results (Henderson, 1996). As such, women's leisure research took on a new form in the mid 1990's that allowed for the examination of different and varied segments of the female population.

This change has led researchers to the realization that groups of women differ both between and among themselves, but does not cast aside the fact that women share some elements of a collective experience (Henderson, 1996). One set of collective experiences that women's leisure researchers examine are the limitations placed upon groups of women by societal roles. These limitations often result in constricted opportunities for women's leisure or restricted forms of acceptable women's leisure (Henderson, 1996). For example, it is still quite unusual for a young woman to play high school football as football is generally thought of as hyper-masculine and therefore inappropriate for women.

However, societal roles and ideals about women may also be directly confronted or even resisted during women's leisure activities (Shaw, 1994), making the study of women's leisure a more holistic study of women's place within society. In studying women's leisure as resistance, or politics, it is important to look at women's motivations, intended results, and feelings about their leisure in relation to one another and in relation to men. For example, women are more likely than men to exercise for weight control, body tone and attractiveness reasons (Strelan, Mehaffey, & Tiggemann, 2003). Women

feel that if their body changes, their feelings and thoughts about their bodies will change as well. This proves problematic, however, as current research shows that exercise for *health* and *fitness* reasons is actually more likely to result in improved body satisfaction and self-esteem than exercise with the intent of *losing weight* or *changing body shape* (Strelan et al., 2003). Therefore, while women may set out to feel better by losing weight or toning, they may end up feeling psychologically worse when they do not meet these goals.

Not only are women seeking recreation programs with the express intent of losing weight, but recreation programming designed for women often includes weight-loss as a goal or main purpose of the program (Shaw & Henderson, 2004). For example, recreation options for women often include aerobics classes, the popular “Abs of Steel” series, and even courses at campus recreation centers with titles such as “Body Blasters.” A study of the goals of recreation programs designed for women also provides a glimpse into how society feels women should be recreating as well as what women themselves are in fact asking for in a recreation program.

Indeed, studies of recreation programs find that in order to better serve women it is necessary to understand that the overall best types of recreation programs for women address both their psychological as well as their physical needs. Therefore, as recreation researchers, we must tease out not only what the particular components of these successful programs may be, but also why women would choose to participate in them, and what may be the emotional and psychological benefits of participating in such programs.

A discussion of the psychological and emotional benefits of leisure for women should include the issues of body image, obesity, and eating disorders due to their prevalence within American society. Indeed, regardless of their actual weight, many women in American society struggle with low body image. In fact, some statistics show that over 80% of American women are dissatisfied with their appearance (*Statistics: National Eating Disorders and Their Precursors*, 2002).

Academic theories exist which may help to explain the large numbers of women with negative body image. For example, objectification theory, developed by Frederickson and Roberts (1997), suggests that “being raised in a culture that objectifies the female body and sexualizes all women leads to women objectifying themselves.” Frederickson and Roberts (1997) call this internalization of external perspectives “self-objectification” and assert that this phenomenon is what makes it very hard for women and girls to feel good about themselves if they do not feel good about their bodies. In fact, a study of 149 adults (51% female and 49% male) with severe mental illness ranging from depression to schizophrenia showed that one of the most prominent predictors of eating disordered behavior, other than severity of mental illness, was being female (Srebnik et al., 2003).

Illustrative of this point is a 1995 study which found that 48% of women between the ages of 18 and 70 have an “unfavorable evaluation of their appearance” (Paquette et al., 2002, p. 172). Indeed, body image and weight dissatisfaction are so common among women that they are considered by many researchers to be a “normative discontent” (Paquette et al., 2002; Wolf, 2002). In other words, poor body image and dissatisfaction

with weight is so common among women that it is now considered a normal albeit unfortunate fact of life.

This normative discontent may not be all that surprising when one considers the many obstacles that stand in the way of women's development of healthy self-images. These obstacles include the media's "perfect" yet unrealistic images of women, the history of women's place in society, cultural expectations of women and femininity, women's power relationships with others, and the effects of aging compared to the youthful ideal woman (Paquette et al., 2002; Wolf, 2002; Kilbourne, 1999).

The most prominent of these obstacles to women's healthy self image, the media, tends to portray women as helpless, frail, thin, and with beauty as their main asset. Reviews of media images have found that in our society "thinness is equated with beauty, fitness, and health" (Kilbourne, 1999; Paquette et al., 2002; Wolf, 2002). This outside pressure combines to create unrealistic and unattainable body goals for many Westernized women. As a result of the pressure to conform to these societal standards, women endure internal conflict in order to comply with what society has deemed an acceptable body. This internal conflict and the resulting self-judgment may contribute to women's growing dissatisfaction with their bodies.

However, it is crucial to ensure that women maintain a healthy body image. Current research has shown that low body image may lessen women's overall life satisfaction by producing depressive symptoms (Ohring & Brooks-Gunn, 2001). Additionally, longitudinal studies such as those conducted by Ohring and Brooks-Gunn (2001) and others cited by the National Eating Disorders Association (2002) have shown

that low body image increases the risk of disordered eating and depression. Indeed, women often try to change their body image by changing their bodies through dieting (which may lead to the development of eating disorders) and over-exercise.

Interestingly, much of the body image literature within the field of leisure studies focuses on the ways in which body image affects women's recreation. For example, studies have shown that women fear or avoid certain recreational situations if they feel uncomfortable with their bodies. James' (2000) study illustrated that adolescent females may avoid swimming pools not only to avoid "male gaze," but also to avoid uncomfortable body situations. Additional studies illustrate how these feelings change women's recreation, for example, women may run at night to avoid being seen, or they may avoid activities like swimming that require tight-fitting clothing because they are uncomfortable displaying their bodies while recreating (James, 2000; Shaw & Henderson, 2004).

Surprisingly, however, there is a lack of literature within the leisure sciences field examining the ways in which *recreation* affects *body image*. For example, we do not know what sorts of recreation programs we should develop to help with the nationwide epidemic of low body image, nor do we know how to help overweight individuals recreate more comfortably. We also do not have a concise understanding of the mental and emotional ways in which recreation programs affect women's body image.

These gaps in research are even more critical to address when one considers that recreational involvements may be one arena for countering low body image and body

dissatisfaction. Studies in the social sciences and leisure research fields have shown that regular physical activity; whether it is in the form of organized recreation or team sports, build body esteem (Datillo et al., 1994; Strelan et al., 2003). An athlete in one study, for example, acknowledged that she had “learned that a healthy body image is more than the absence of struggles around food, weight or appearance. A healthy body image is about power, self awareness and self acceptance” (Dahlkoetter, 2002, p. 48). This highlights the need to understand the assets of women’s group leisure.

When discussing the benefits of structured group leisure for women, especially those benefits that may evolve into greater social change, it becomes useful and appropriate to examine social world theory. Social worlds, in Strauss’ work, consist of almost any type of human group interaction, including the social groups and subworlds that exist within structured organizations. Social worlds are often organized around a particular activity or site/location, a technology exists for carrying out the activities of the social world, and an organization may even exist to further the social world’s activities (Strauss, 1978). The study of these social worlds and the study of wider social change are, according to Strauss’ (1978) work, two sides of the same coin. One may not study social change and processes, he states, without studying the related social worlds (Strauss, 1978).

In particular, it is interesting to consider the social worlds that may be developed as a result of participation in even short term leisure groups (less than 6 months in duration) and the ways in which the social worlds formed during this time provide benefits to participants. For example, one may ask if the recreation program itself was

spawned from a social movement or if it is creating one. In doing so, one must examine the literature surrounding the recreation group (pamphlets, magazines, and websites) as well as the feelings, beliefs, and involvement of its members. This type of examination of a recreation program centers around the process by which the program creates or becomes a social world. Strauss (1978) states that the examination of processes is crucial to identifying, describing and studying social worlds and the possible impacts they may have on larger society.

Indeed, some scholarly work has addressed the role of social world theory in group formation, identity, and validation. Wolkomir's (2001) article examining ideological change among groups of gay and ex-gay Christian men sheds light on the psychological benefits of what she calls "social groups" and the ways in which these groups create collective identities which they may then apply to the larger world. More specifically, Wolkomir's (2001) qualitative interviews and observations of these groups illustrate that the men use their group identity to create a new, often counter-culture, collective identity.

This same collective identity creation may be taking place in recreation training groups as well. For example, all-female recreation groups may provide women with collective and alternate views of their bodies. While these women may feel overweight and unattractive in a broader social context, among their recreation group members they may be regarded as strong and able-bodied. It may be that the stories that the recreation group tells may then encourage these views: stories of how they conquered a 20 mile

bike ride, or a 3 mile run, may reinforce the way that some women look within the group and make it acceptable and even necessary.

Wolkomir's study (2001) also illustrates that members of these small groups may be able to take a newly created collective identity (for example, that of a Christian gay man who is not a sinner) and use it in a broader social context by seeing themselves first as a member of a group and then as a member of society at large. In doing so, they learn to represent themselves with the group identity that the social world has created and to reject the perhaps negative identity that society has placed on them.

Again, the study of this phenomenon among women is necessary because women and men perceive leisure quite differently. In illustration of this point, Henderson et al. (1996) indicate that, aside from family, women's primary social interaction comes in the form of groups – often women's only social groups. These women's only groups are important because they may allow women more freedom from gender role constraints, and they also provide opportunities for empowerment, personal growth, and a feeling of control (Henderson et al., 1996).

A study of women's leisure groups as social worlds capable of affecting change would be incomplete without an examination of the concept of resistance. The concept of leisure as resistance states that oppressed, underprivileged, or overlooked groups within society may use some form of leisure to counter societal norms (Bialeschki, 2004; Shaw, 2001). Leisure as resistance has the potential outcome of enhancing individual empowerment and bringing about social change. Indeed, as Shaw (2001) notes, "It is oppressed or disadvantaged groups or individuals who are acting to change poor

relations and gain personal or collective empowerment who are seen to exemplify resistance” (p. 188). Glover’s (2003) study of resistance in the form of creating a community garden found that the people involved in creating the garden were not only resisting the deterioration of their neighborhood, but were also able to “look at the events that led to the garden as evidence that they were something other than what outsiders saw them as” (p. 206).

However, as Shaw (2001) points out, the intentionality and outcome of resistance are not as important as the actual process. In other words, resistance may be unintentional and yet succeed at changing societal opinion, or it may be intentional and fail at creating societal change, and yet it is resistance nonetheless (Bialeschki, 2004). The important thing is that the study of leisure as resistance may help to further a greater understanding of leisure as political practice, especially for minority or oppressed groups (Shaw, 2001).

Leisure is, in fact, a prime arena for political expression as it is an aspect of social life in which power is brokered and norms and ideologies are questioned all within view of the media (Shaw, 2001). Indeed, if one feels as structuralists do that societal ideologies function to make power inequities seem natural and normal, then the history of women in sports would provide a fertile ground for examining such normalizing ideologies and their changes over time.

The study of leisure as a political arena is still controversial as it requires the dismissal of the idea of leisure as innocent fun and relaxation. Therefore, examining resistance as a possible outcome of leisure behavior requires the belief that leisure is

more than innocent play or sport, indeed one must acknowledge that leisure behavior may be political as well (Shaw, 2001).

Individual empowerment through leisure, for example, may empower others in similar situations and in doing so provide not only individual benefits but collective benefits as well (Shaw, 2001). In this way, resistance is both individual and collective and may bring benefits for both (Shaw, 2001). These outcomes bring leisure beyond innocence and into the realm of political activity. For example, in Glover's (2003) community garden study, he found that the community gardeners used their garden success story to strengthen their collective identity.

To gain a better understanding of this phenomenon, Shaw (2001) calls for the documentation of leisure activities where resistance is taking place and a focus on what is being resisted. While the traditional resistance framework calls for an examination of traditionally oppressed groups, some variations of this have also been successful such as Glover's (2003) study among well educated whites. In the end, however, most resistance scholars agree that only "collective action can effectively generate lasting social" change (Henderson et al., 1996, p. 151). One form of collective action may be leisure as resistance within distinct social worlds.

The Danskin Experience

One example of a social world constructed and maintained largely for women is that surrounding the Danskin women-only triathlon in Austin, Texas. Each June over 3,000 women come to Austin to participate in a sprint distance (0.5 mile swim, 12 mile

bike, 5K run) triathlon hosted by the Danskin clothing company and benefiting the Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer Foundation. In order to prepare for the race, many of the women also participate in 6-8 week women-only training programs leading up to the June event.

Many attributes make the Danskin experience different from that of a standard, co-ed triathlon. The Danskin race organizers make sure that the event focuses only on the emotional and psychological experience of participation and not on race times or winning. In fact, the motto of the race is “The Woman who starts the Race is not the same Woman who finishes the Race.” In striving for such an atmosphere, Danskin organizers do many things differently from standard triathlons.

Danskin race categories, for example, are divided not only into age group, but also into cancer survivorship, and even “family” groups which allow women of varied ages to be out on the race course together. Most standard triathlons, in comparison, are divided only into age and weight categories wherein women weighing over 145 pounds race in an “Athena” category. Danskin does not divide women by weight, and in fact the very structure of Danskin even ensures that no participant will finish last. Instead, Sally Edwards, the Danskin triathlon spokeswoman and “sweeper”, always finishes last herself.

Therefore, the unique and communal characteristics of the Danskin race, which focuses on the emotional and psychological and not the physical, creates a special social bond among its participants. This atmosphere is expanded by Danskin training programs

which often follow the model of the race event and also focus on community, having fun, and doing something challenging together as a group.

In 2004, I attended the Danskin Triathlon race in Austin, Texas where I gathered preliminary survey data and spoke with thirty-eight Danskin participants. This experience encouraged me time to hone my survey questions and allowed me to develop relationships with several training groups. My survey data indicated that women were receiving several benefits from participating in events such as the Danskin Triathlon, in particular, they were receiving benefits from participation in training groups leading up to the triathlon. I found that 63% of these women were participating in their first triathlon, 43% were participating because it was something they wanted to prove to themselves that they could do, 60.5% indicated that working towards and participating in the Danskin made them feel better about their bodies (self-reported), and 86.8% said that they would participate in Danskin again. These preliminary data are important because they indicate interesting reasons for participation, positive benefits of participation, and a high level of desire to participate again.

These data also lead me to the exploration of social worlds, especially those created within training groups. Social world theory is often illustrated by the study of support groups or clubs, and it became apparent that the Danskin training groups shared many of these other groups' mechanics.

My preliminary study of the Danskin triathlon also encouraged me to examine the idea of leisure as resistance as so many of the women indicated that they felt better about their bodies and themselves after participating in the training and race despite the

fact that greater society tells them they should strive for thinness as perfection. Sue Shaw (1994) explicitly states that intentionality is not a crucial component of successful (or unsuccessful) resistance, and so I began to think of the Danskin training participants as using leisure to resist dominant societal stereotypes about women's bodies – whether they intentionally did so or not.

This preliminary study of the Danskin triathlon along with my examination of social world theory and leisure as resistance shaped the questions I asked and the approach I took to gathering data for this study. I did not set out to confirm or disconfirm current data, but instead to explore several concepts simultaneously which have often been examined alone.

Statement of the Problem and Objectives

As a means to explore the Danskin experience within the framework of social worlds and leisure as resistance, I examined two Austin Danskin triathlon training program's effects on participant's body image as well as their affect on women's feelings about themselves and about sport in general. I also attempted to discover the mechanics behind this change, and this exploration led me to incorporate the literature I had read previously on leisure as resistance as well as the study of social worlds.

From February through April 2005, I conducted interviews with fifteen former Danskin training participants and instructors as well as reviewed websites related to these training sessions.

The end product of this exploratory work is an examination of the formation of social worlds among participants in two certain Danskin training programs as well as a discussion of leisure as resistance as it occurs within these social worlds. The relationship between program participation and body image was also determined.

Justification for the Study

This thesis attempts to understand how best to assimilate and understand current women's recreation programming literature with an eye towards leisure as resistance, social worlds, and body image concerns. The study of social worlds will help to explain why women are able to re-think their bodies and sport, and helps to determine what social mechanisms are in place within the training groups that encourage this change. An examination of resistance helps to explain how program participants went about challenging the dominant societal paradigms about women, sport, and bodies.

This study was exploratory in nature. Nonetheless, I hope that the data and findings collected in this study will be used to not only to further the literature as it relates to women's leisure as resistance, social worlds and body image but also will be applicable to practitioners who are programming for women.

Definition of Terms

Danskin triathlon: Women-only triathlon held in several sites nationwide, but in Austin, TX specifically for this study. The triathlon consists of an 800 meter swim, 12

mile bike, and 5 kilometer run. Its goals as denoted by literature and its website are community building, acceptance and completion instead of competition and winning.

Danskin training program: A women-only program, usually lasting from 6-8 weeks, designed specifically to train and prepare participants for the Danskin triathlon as well as operate within the goals and form of the Danskin triathlon.

Danskin training participants: Women who have participated in a 6-8 week training course designed specifically to prepare them for the Danskin triathlon.

Body image: The way a person thinks or feels about her body shape as well as how she interprets these thoughts and feelings. A positive body image would mean that a person feels good about her body shape and size while a negative body image would imply that she feels poorly about her body shape and size.

Self image: The way a person feels about her self as a whole, including the physical as well as the mental. Body image may comprise a part of the overall self image of some people.

Leisure as resistance: The concept of leisure as resistance states that oppressed, underprivileged, or overlooked groups within society may use some form of leisure to counter societal norms (Bialeschki, 2004; Shaw, 2001).

Social world: Social worlds consist of almost any type of human group interaction, including the social groups and subworlds that exist within structured organizations. Social worlds are often organized around a particular activity or site/location and an organization may even exist to further the social world's activities

(Strauss, 1978). Examples of social worlds include Wednesday night Bunko groups or even the NAACP.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Ours is an age obsessed with youth, health and physical beauty. Television and motion pictures, the dominant visual media, churn out persistent reminders that the lithe and graceful body, the dimpled smile set in an attractive face, are the keys to happiness, perhaps even its essence.

- Kern, 1975

No book has yet been written in praise of a woman who let her husband and children starve or suffer while she invented even the most useful things, or wrote books, or expressed herself in art, or evolved philosophic systems.

- Spencer, 1912

The general subject of women and their leisure has become progressively more detailed, expanded and fleshed out over the past twenty years. Henderson, Bialeschki, Shaw and Freysinger's (1996) seminal work on women and leisure, *Both Gains and Gaps*, delved into women's lives, leisure, and freedom with utmost dexterity. Issues such as the ethic of care, a sense of lack of entitlement to leisure, cycles of leisure, motherhood and leisure, appearance concerns, and constraints to leisure were examined from a feminist perspective and within the context of women's leisure (Bialeschki & Michener, 1994; Henderson, 1996; Shaw and Henderson, 2004). During the first ten to fifteen years, the study of women's leisure was legitimizing itself, and to do so, it often examined women as one homogenous group within society (Henderson, Hodges & Kivel, 2002).

More recently, however, scholars of women's leisure have called for careful examinations of different groups of women and cautioned that "one size does not fit all"

when exploring issues surrounding women's leisure (Henderson, Hodges & Kivel, 2002). In many ways, the body of literature on women and leisure has built on its past and is now able to move forward into "examining deeper meanings of the research that can lead to individual and collective empowerment" (Henderson, Hodges & Kivel, 2002, p. 259). Henderson et al (2002) called for "critical approaches that focus on how leisure does or does not contribute to the lives of individuals and communities" (p. 266), the study of "complexities of power and the multiple forms of oppression" that women face on a daily basis (p. 267), and the examination of leisure as a site of social change. This study will examine some of the issues Henderson et al (2002) bring to attention while also drawing on the rich body of knowledge about women and leisure that already exists.

This chapter is organized into five sections. The first section provides a discussion of body image and its relation to recreation participation. The second section provides an overview of social world theory and its relation to group and individual identity formation with a brief description of anthropology's narrative theory. The third is an examination of the theory of leisure as resistance as it applies to feminist leisure theory. The fourth is an overview of effective recreation programming for women. The last section provides a summary of the ideas presented in this chapter.

Body Image

Body image refers to the way that a person sees and feels about his or her body. Body image is not a fixed perception and may in fact change many times over the course of a day or a lifetime. For example, a woman may feel very secure in her body while

lying around the house in pajamas, but donning a bathing suit and going to the public pool may cause her anxiety about her body. Similarly, a young girl may feel very comfortable with her image at age 12, yet when she hits puberty, she may become self-conscious about her changing body.

It has been observed that body image may be formed and re-formed as a result of many outside and internal influences (*Women and Sport*, 2004). These changes in body image are important to examine because body image affects the most basic everyday life choices such as diet, health, and the decision about whether or not to exercise (Wiggins & Moode, 2000). For example, people who feel overweight may be hesitant to exercise in public for fear of ridicule (Wolf, 2002), while people with a positive view of their bodies are more likely to feel comfortable using their bodies and less likely to suffer from body-image-related depression (Tantleff-Dunn & Agliata, 2001).

Construction of Body Image

Within consumer culture the body is proclaimed as a vehicle of pleasure: it's desirable and desiring and the closer the actual body approximates to the idealized images of youth, health, fitness and beauty, the higher its exchange-value.

- Featherstone, 1991

Body image is a self-perception that all people develop, regardless of exposure to media or outside influences (Wiggins & Moode, 2000). In modern Western society, body image is often associated with negativity, dangerous eating habits, or severe diet regimes; but in fact, an image of one's body is developed by every human being in every stage of life.

To illustrate this point, consider Baker et al.'s (1998) study of 60 women, 20 of whom were congenitally blind, 20 blinded later in life, and 20 sighted. Researchers found that those women who had been born blind still developed some mental image of their bodies and judged that image in some way (Baker et al., 1998). However, there

were differences between sighted and blind women as to what they *thought* of this image and how it made them feel. These differences will be discussed later on in this chapter.

Frederickson & Roberts (1997), curious about body image creation, devised the “objectification theory” to explain facets of women’s body image development. They found that being raised in a culture that objectifies the female body and sexualizes all women leads to women objectifying themselves (Frederickson & Roberts, 1997; Parsons & Betz, 2001). They call this process “self-objectification” and link it to women’s “habitual body monitoring.” This constant evaluation of the self, researchers contend, is a side effect of self-objectification and may lead to eating disorders, depression, and general lessening of the quality of life (Frederickson & Roberts, 1997, p. 173). As a result, objectification theory may be used to explain, in part, why so many Westernized women are unhappy with their bodies.

In order to understand how culture objectifies the female body in the first place, and how modern technology and science then help women critique themselves down to the smallest measure, consider the advent of the electronic scale (we now know to the gram how much we weigh), the 1920’s discovery of the calorie (we can measure exactly how much energy we consume and exactly how much we need to use to lose a pound), advances in scientific medicine (we have uniform charts and measures and expectations of the body), and the increasing perfection of bodies in movies and advertising which have all worked to form a new and more exacting ideal of physical excellence (Brumberg, 1997). Many people in Western society then use these ideals as comparative models, and strive to mimic them through the use of dieting and measuring technology.

When they find that the ideal form can not be achieved, the mental strain may lead to body image disorders, more serious eating disorders, and other mental disturbances. In other words, just as Fredrickson and Roberts suggested, we have internalized these ideals and now we hold *ourselves* accountable for upholding them. Therefore, while all people have some sort of internal view of and opinion about their bodies, psychologists and professionals' concerns begin when one group in particular appears to have a consistently negative body image, or begins to internalize societal standards and ideals (*Women in Sport*, 2004). In the case of Western society, this one group is women.

Rates of body image dissatisfaction among men are also on the rise, however, and so while this work will focus on women's body image, it is important to note that body image disorders are now becoming a nationwide epidemic crossing all cultural and gender barriers (Wolf, 2002). It is also important to recognize that the body has long been thought of as a site of power and that the body "remains the privileged image" by which we are judged, understood and recognized (Frank, 1990, p. 154).

Media Influences

When discussing body image within any group it is important to recognize that a healthy body image may only be developed when a person's immediate environment supports a positive view of the body and when that person's experiences with their body are mainly favorable (*Women and Sport*, 2004). It appears, therefore, that a very strong connection exists between images of popular culture and media and *poor* body image (Cox & Thompson, 2000; Shroff & Thompson, 2003) as cultural expectations are swiftly communicated through television, movies, magazines and other forms of print media (Tantleff-Dunn & Agliata, 2001). This consumer culture, argues Featherstone in his 1991 historical study of the body, tells us that "ascribed body qualities [are] plastic –

with effort and ‘body work’ individuals are persuaded that they can achieve a certain desired appearance” (Featherstone, 1991, p. 178). After reviewing the literature and studying visual media, Frederickson and Roberts (1997) found that images of males tend to emphasize the face and head, while women are portrayed with an emphasis on their bodies, often even headless bodies such as those seen in advertisements.

But why are women so susceptible to these media influences? After all, if we do not want to see or hear a message, we can simply turn off the TV, stop reading the article, put down the magazine, right? Wrong, say Naomi Wolf (author of *The Beauty Myth*) and Jean Kilbourne (author of *Can't Buy My Love: How Advertising Changes the Way We Think and Feel* and director of the popular film *Killing Us Softly*). These researchers have shown that the media are everywhere; it is our environment and the medium in which we live our lives. Frederickson & Roberts (1997) would agree, as they suggest that “these images are virtually unavoidable in American culture” (p. 177).

Moreover, one cannot escape the positive attention that attractive women receive in American culture. Indeed, physical beauty is power and currency in modern society, and a review of the literature by Frederickson & Roberts (1997) shows that overweight or unattractive women report more job discrimination, a harder time finding romantic relationships, and more negative feedback from their colleagues and peers. The 1989 Supreme Court Case *Price Waterhouse v Hopkins* (in which a female attorney sued the firm of Price Waterhouse for denying her advancement) demonstrated that a woman who does not behave in a feminine manner may be denied promotion or looked upon unfavorably by her peers. Justice Brennan’s opinion states that “There were clear

signs...that some of the partners reacted negatively to Hopkins' personality because she was a woman. One partner described her as 'macho' (Defendant's Exh. 30); another suggested that she 'overcompensated for being a woman' (Defendant's Exh. 31); a third advised her to take 'a course at charm school' (Defendant's Exh. 27). Several partners criticized her use of profanity; and in response, another partner suggested that those partners objected to her swearing only 'because it's a lady using foul language'" (Legal Information Institute, n.d.). The message is that women suffer consequences for breaking societal norms regarding what it means to be female, and the way a woman looks is certainly part of the norm.

Women's magazines also serve to perpetuate society's ideas about the perfect woman as representations of women in these magazines have themselves become women's mass culture (Wolf, 2002). According to the Magazine Publishers of America (www.magazine.org), in 2003 the top three women's magazines were *Woman's Day*, *Ladies Home Journal*, and *Cosmopolitan* and they had a combined circulation of over 10 million (Magazine Publishers of America, 2003). Therefore, keeping in mind the influence they have, note that between 1968 and 1972 the number of diet-related articles in women's magazines rose by 70% (Wolf, 2002). Models and actresses proudly displayed the results of these diets and projected the implied message: "You can be like me!"

As a result, our society in general has been conditioned to like thin bodies and dislike full ones. Wolf (2002) points out in observation of American culture, "The politeness people extend as a matter of course to the bodies of men does not apply to

those of women: Women have little physical privacy. Each change or weight fluctuation is publicly observed, judged, and discussed” (p. 126-127).

Using the resources of athletic trainers, specialized chefs, and encouraging personal assistants, Hollywood celebrities are able to closely model this “perfect” body to thousands of women through movies, television ads, modeling photos and popular magazines. As Baker et al.’s (1998) study among blind and sighted women shows, the “ability to visualize oneself and others is integrally linked to the dissatisfaction with one’s own body shape” (p. 321). This study concluded that women who are congenitally blind or were blinded later in life show little concern for their external image, and exhibit little if any body image or eating disorders (Baker et al., 1998).

Other studies have shown that poor body image problems have spread to countries where Western media and ideals have also increased. Several studies allude to the effects of this dispersion, such as Shroff and Thompson’s (2003) article about body image and eating disturbances in India. The authors note that India has been exposed to Western media for over ten years, and that this exposure has created a greater emphasis on meeting international standards of every kind. This exposure and pressure explains, they hypothesize, the comparable rates of eating disorders between the United States and India. In fact, statistics compiled by the National Eating Disorders Association state that 10 million women in America are suffering from either anorexia or bulimia and 25 million more women suffer from binge eating disorders (*Statistics: National Eating Disorders and Their Precursors*, 2002).

One interesting case study from Susan Bordo's (2003) review of the literature on body image found that there were no eating disorders reported in the Fijian Islands prior to 1995. Three years later, however, 62% of Fijian girls were dieting (Bordo, 2003). What changed? Television was introduced to the islands in 1995 and with it came the spread of Western body ideals (Bordo, 2003).

Another interesting study conducted in 2000 among the Old World Amish shows that of a sample of 106 Amish (50 males and 56 females aged 13-67) only two had ever dieted (2 older women) (Platte et al., 2000). While some of these study participants felt that they should probably lose weight, they did not feel concerned enough to restrict their caloric intake or feel bad about themselves (Platte et al., 2000). Consider that this Amish population lives without electricity and certainly without access to Westernized media and it becomes likely that a correlation exists.

Indeed, the visual media in particular have proven to be a large contributor to women's body image perceptions. After all, in order for our consumer culture to operate, it "depends upon the cultivation of an insatiable appetite for consumer images" (Featherstone 1991, p. 178). In satisfying this appetite, the visual media allow women to compare their bodies to idealistic and often fabricated "perfect" bodies, a practice that leads to high rates of eating disorders (Baker et al., 1998). The media tells us, then, that we should wage war with our bodies (through dieting and exercise) and combat signs of aging or weight gain (Featherstone, 1991).

Thin Women Are Healthy Women

Markula finds in her 1998 work that, through the media, many women learn that, “a beautiful woman has to possess a thin, toned and young body” (Markula, 1998, p. 9). In accordance with these findings, Featherstone (1991) concluded that “fitness and slimness [have become] associated not only with energy, drive and vitality but with worthiness as a person; likewise the body beautiful comes to be taken as a sign of prudence and prescience in health matters” (p. 184). He calls this the “looking good and feeling good” message of advertising and consumer culture (p. 184). The visual media, therefore, give women an ideal with which to compare their own bodies. After all, as Featherstone reminds us, “Images invite comparison” (p. 179). In fact, a recent study of 328 high school girls, mean age 14 years, in six United States high schools found that even posters aimed to fight body image problems and help girls feel good about themselves actually made them feel worse. The reason was that the girls were comparing themselves to the girls in the posters and feeling that they were not as attractive or thin as those girls (O’Dea, 2002).

What some scholars find even more frightening is that women are learning that their “problem areas,” the areas most in need of improvement, are in fact the same areas which identify us as women: abdomen, bottom, thighs and underarms, the natural fat storage areas for women and the areas that create the womanly shape. “Logically then,” Pirkko Markula from the University of Waikato, Hamilton extrapolates, in many cases women “hate looking like women” (Markula, 1998, p. 10).

Body Struggles

As is evident in today's society, "environmental pressure to be thin and messages urging incorporation of weight concerns into self-evaluation tend to be targeted more toward women" (Reichborn-Kjennerud et al, 2003, p. 124). Indeed, through the media and through swift societal punishment, our culture has called for taller and thinner female bodies over time (Tantleff-Dunn & Agliata, 2001). This is concerning because it has been determined that women place significantly more value on weight in their self-evaluations than do men (Reichborn-Kjennerud et al, 2003). In essence, given the data above, society is teaching women that their bodies reflect their level of health. We learn that being thin and being healthy is the same thing (Markula, 1998) and as an almost direct result, 80% of women will diet sometime in their lifetimes (Baker et al, 1998).

Women's discontent with their bodies and unending struggles to "correct" them have resulted in the labeling of body image disorders as normative (Rodin et al, 1984) - "self-acceptance gets minimal support while entire industries devote themselves to the constant (and profitable) pursuit of change" (Edut, 2004, p. xx).

"Looks, girls learn early, collapse into a metaphor for everything else. They quickly become the defining criteria for our status and our worth. And somewhere along the line, we stop believing in our own beauty and its dominion. Subsequently, we also stop believing in the power of our minds and our bodies" (Gilman, 2004, p. 16).

However, it may be argued that dissatisfaction with one's body is a perfectly understandable reaction for women. It may be that "Culture has taught us to be insecure bodies: we have learned that we do not measure up to the dominant cultural standard -

the fatless, flab-less, ageless body. Therefore, body dissatisfaction, rather than being thought of as an illness, may be viewed as a natural reaction to the impossible body ideal” (Markula, 1998, p. 11). One woman, as quoted in the popular book *Body Outlaws*, proclaims that “Our bodies have become like private correctional facilities, and we their prisoners. Body outlaws are the escaped convicts, their only crime a desire to live free from the confining pressures to achieve a beauty they didn’t imagine themselves” (Edut, 2004, p. xx). It becomes apparent that body image, in the end, is a social construction. However, its lack of scientific grounding does not make it any less powerful. On the contrary, the social construction of body image is a powerful force in modern society.

Body Image and Self-Esteem

The images in the advertisements, popular press and health education pamphlets are of lithe, bright-eyed beautiful people, in varying states of nakedness, enjoying their body work. The fat are invariably portrayed as glum and downcast, joke figures, survivals from a bygone age.

- Featherstone, 1991

According to Tantleff-Dunn and Agliata (2001), people’s physical appearance affects not only how they feel about themselves, but also how they are viewed and even treated by other people (Tantleff-Dunn & Agliata, 2001). Subsequently, our perceptions and beliefs about how others see us also affect how we feel about ourselves. Very early on women learn that “Beautiful women are healthy, successful, in control and confident.” “The characteristics of healthful beauty have been expanded to include a psychological dimension: the attractive female body has come to signify a controlled

mind and healthy self-confidence.” (Spitzack, 1990 in Markula, 1998, p. 10). Therefore, women learn that in order to have high self esteem, they must also be attractive. In fact, a 2003 study of 104 females between the ages of 16 and 24 who were regular patrons of a gym found that increased body satisfaction coincides with increased self esteem (Strelan et al, 2003).

Markula’s (1998) overview of theories surrounding BIDS (Body Image Distortion Syndrome) finds that BIDS is directly related to self-esteem. In fact, low self-esteem results in women not simply feeling fat, but instead judging their bodies by much stricter standards. “If women felt better about themselves,” Markula continues, “they would be less likely to overestimate their size” (p. 11).

Effects of Poor Body Image

I would have girls regard themselves not as adjectives but as nouns.
- Elizabeth Cady Stanton

As Brumberg (1997) notes in her popular collection *The Body Project: An Intimate History of American Girls*, many girls today believe that “the body is the ultimate expression of the self” (p. 97). Therefore, helping women conquer body dissatisfaction is important not only because dissatisfaction can lead to low self esteem, but also because body dissatisfaction leads to even more tangible and dangerous physical and mental health problems as women search for ultimate perfection of the self. “American culture teaches both women and men to cover our ears when we hear our bodies talking to us. By silencing our bodies, we end up with health problems [...]”

(Berger, 2004, p. 157-158). Indeed, a negative self image may lead to a loss of self-confidence, eating disorders, or social/behavioral problems (Brumberg, 1997).

One of the most common results of poor body image is the start of dieting behaviors. Brumberg's (1997) review of the literature and of medical data found that girls now commonly begin dieting at the age of 9 or 10 (p. 119). This is dangerous behavior, as one author in the popular book "Body Outlaws" found when she compiled a list from medical journals of the possible medical illnesses associated with dieting. Her list included anxiety, depression, heart disease, eating disorders, reduced resistance to infection and even osteoporosis (Williams, 2004). The National Eating Disorders Association (NEDA) agrees, finding that dieting is capable of increasing the risk of heart disease as well as permanently affecting metabolism. The NEDA also finds that frequent dieting may lead to eating disorders (*Body Image*, 2002).

A study of the Framingham population as published in the New England Journal of Medicine shows that fluctuations in weight, like those prevalent during dieting, may actually increase the risk of death from heart disease independent of obesity (Lissner et al, 1991). In concurrence with the above findings, a contributor to *Body Outlaws* found, by reviewing medical journals, that "high blood pressure is another side effect of the mental and physical stress of dieting" (Williams 2004, p. 181). Therefore dieting, especially "yo-yo dieting" or the kind of rash dieting often associated with eating disorders, is not a behavior to be taken lightly.

Dieting behavior that becomes manic or uncontrollable may, as the NEDA also stresses, result in eating disorders (Markula, 1998). Indeed, research conducted by

academics and professional organizations alike indicates that there is a clear connection between women with negative body images and poor eating behaviors and even eating disorders (*Body Image*, 2002) (Tantleff-Dunn & Agliata, 2001). A webpage run by the Australian government summarizes eating disorder research to date and finds that “The relationship is consistent; almost every person suffering from an eating disorder suffers from a severely distorted body image” (*Women in Sport*, 2004).

Even more disturbing are Bordo’s research findings that “the recovery rate for eating disorders is grim: 5-15% dies in treatment and about 50% never recover completely” (Markula 1998, p. 11). This rate is echoed by Wolf in her popular 2002 book: *The Beauty Myth*. Now, compare this statistic to a group of famine victims from third world countries who were treated in the Netherlands between 1944 and 1945 and whose recovery rates were 66% (Wolf, 2002, p. 182). Statistically, you could say that girls with anorexia have a slimmer chance of recovery than do famine victims from third world countries.

These grim findings are reinforced by an article in the online journal “WebMD” which stated that recovery rates for eating disorders are at best 50% with a very high rate of relapse (DeNoon, 2002). Wolf postulates that, given the low recovery rates and high death rates, anorexia is in fact the biggest killer of American girls between the ages of 15-24 (Wolf, 2002, p. 5). In fact, anorexia in particular, according to Wolf’s research, has one of the highest fatality rates for any mental illness. The effects of body image disorders are, in fact, killing or sickening American girls at an incredibly fast rate. For example, given statistical knowledge about eating disorders in America, if you were

looking at 10 American college women, chances are that 2 would be anorexic, 6 would suffer from bulimia, and only 2 would have healthy eating habits (Wolf, 2002, p. 182). These statistics mean that body image dissatisfaction is not just a concern because women are suffering mentally, but it is a nationwide health risk and one that must be dealt with quickly and efficiently.

Body Image and Recreation

The relationship between body image and recreation is complex. On one hand, women who participate in athletics in general have been found to have better body esteem than those who do not participate (Wiggins & Moode, 2000), and yet many researchers have found that a connection exists between eating disorders and elite female athletes, especially those in sports with an emphasis on aesthetics and body presentation. These kinds of sports are commonly referred to in the literature as “weight dependent,” and they include sports that rely on or emphasize slim body builds. Examples of these types of sports include, but are not limited to, gymnastics, swimming, long distance running and cheerleading.

A study by Sjostedt and Jevne (1993) aimed to determine whether athletes in some sports suffered from body image complications more than athletes in other sports. To do this, they divided sports into three categories: activities that emphasize leanness (e.g. gymnastics and diving), activities that require a weigh-in (lightweight rowing and wrestling for example), and activities that do not require a weigh-in nor emphasize leanness (e.g. volleyball and football). The authors then administered the Eating Attitudes Test (EAT) to 191 athletes (104 females and 87 males) and found that while

male athletes in general may be at greater risk for developing eating disorders than non-male athletes (athletes in this case referred to collegiate athletes involved in serious training and competition), it was the female athletes who really suffered from eating disorders the most. In fact, male athlete's EAT scores did not differ from sport category to sport category (those emphasizing leanness to compared to those where a weigh-in is required, for example), only female athletes showed this differentiation.

A study by Blaydon and Lindner (2002) selected triathletes from two competitions: one regional and one international, to take part in a study to link excessive exercise and eating disorders. A total of 203 athletes (126 males and 77 females) from a range of ability levels (sub-elite to elite) completed the surveys. The researchers found that 34% of triathletes displayed symptoms of an eating disorder (as determined by the EAT), and of those 34%, 50% were females and 27% males. This study makes it possible, therefore, to show not only that triathlons may be a sport that emphasizes leanness (although there is not enough research to show this) but also to illustrate the high instance of eating disorders even among female athletes.

Therefore, it seems evident that much of complexity involved in the study of body image concerns and recreation is due to both the existence of weight-dependent sports and their relation to body image and eating disorder concerns among participants (DiBartolo & Shaffer, 2002), as well as women's use of recreation as a tool for losing weight (Markula, 1998).

For instance, after two years of fieldwork with aerobicizers of every shape, age and sex, and through a review of literature and popular media, Markula (1998) found

that women viewed recreation and especially exercise as a tool for fitting the ideal body image. In other words, many women exercise to become more toned and to lose weight instead of exercising for enjoyment.

Therefore, by focusing the types of sports that women are involved in from weight dependent to weight independent (hockey, volleyball and basketball for example), or working to change women's reasons for sports participation, the relationship between recreation and body image becomes even more evident: women need and benefit from the right kinds recreation and sport activities and may suffer negative consequences from participating in other types of activities (DiBartolo & Shaffer, 2002) (Lucas, 2000).

A study in 2002 by DiBartolo and Shaffer surveyed 115 non-athletes and 94 athletes in areas including eating attitudes, body satisfaction, and reasons for exercise. Their findings were that, overall, exercise is very psychologically healthy for women and that athletes (women engaged in regular athletic activities) have lower rates of disordered eating and lower rates of body image concern than non-athletes (women who do not participate in athletics regularly). Another report, which reviewed the literature extensively concluded that "Involvement in physical activity, exercise and sport promotes psychological well-being" (*Physical Activity and Sport in the Lives of Girls*. Section IV. 2004). In concurrence with this statement, The Presidents Council on Physical Fitness and Sport Report (a review of current literature and medical knowledge) in 2004 found that very particular benefits arise from women's participation in sports, including participation's role as "a mood enhancer and an anxiety reducer, thereby

acting as a natural, cost-effective intervention for the mental health of adolescent girls.”
(*Physical Activity and Sport in the Lives of Girls*. Sections II and IV 2004).

Additionally, the President’s Council on Physical Fitness and Sport found that exercise and sport participation enhance female mental health by producing “positive feelings about body image, improved self esteem, tangible experiences of competency and success and increased self confidence” (*Physical Activity and Sport in the Lives of Girls*. Sections II and IV 2004).

A study conducted by Tantleff-Dunn & Agliata (2001) surveyed 202 college-aged women and 49 older women (average age 70) found that the more physically active women report that they were, the more satisfied they were with their physical appearance. In contrast, they also found that “inactivity in women is significantly related to a high drive for thinness, eating disorder symptomatology, and depression” (p. 24).

Social Worlds

One method of examining the correlation between body image and recreation is by examining it through the use of social world theory. Unruh (1979) defines social worlds as “an internally recognizable constellation of actors, organizations, events and practices which have coalesced into a perceived sphere of interest and involvement for participants” (p. 115). He also defines them more broadly as “[units] of social organization” (Unruh, 1979, p. 126). These may include “occupational contract networks, invisible colleges, behavior systems, activity systems, and subcultures (Unruh,

1980, p. 271). For the purposes of this study, social worlds will be defined as subcultures made up of Danskin participants, trainers, organizers, and sponsors.

Social world theory provides researchers with a tool for examining the culture that is created within a particular group. Strauss (1978) suggests that studying social worlds may also help us to understand the processes behind social change. This becomes particularly relevant when examining a change in social construction, like body image, because of participation in a certain group. Strauss addresses this when he states that “some people are defenders of a world’s ‘shape;’ others wish to change the shape” (p. 124). He then went on to assert that “*fashions* (emphasis original) flourish in every world, so their appearance and disappearance should surely be studied in relation to social world processes” (Strauss, 1978, p. 125). Therefore, it is important to study the ways in which members of a social world create new cultural standards perhaps distinct from the cultural standards of a larger social world (society). This may certainly be the case within the Danskin race community as bodies become more about what they are able to do than how they look.

Social World Theory in Action

Several recent studies have encompassed the work of social world theorists in order to examine specific social worlds and the ways in which they maneuver within the larger society. For example, Chafetz and Kotarba’s (1999) work with Little League mothers in Texas examined the ways in which one particular social world (that surrounding Little League baseball) is able to create and maintain traditional gender roles for both the boys participating in Little League as well as their mothers. To do this,

Chafetz and Kotarba examined three of greater society's traditional expectations of women: women feed their families, women encourage men, and women work within the family. They then applied these expectations to the social world created by Little League baseball and found that the activities, assumptions and goals surrounding the management of teams and games mirrored and even amplified each of these traditional expectations (Chafetz and Kotarba, 1999). The women Chafetz and Kotarba (1999) studied were primarily responsible for cooking dinners for Little Leaguers, decorating pins, hats, shirts and banners in celebration of their team, and working to create social networks of other mothers and participants. Men, in contrast, were only expected to come to the team's games and perhaps one man was expected to volunteer to coach. Therefore, in this example, greater society's values are amplified and repeated within a smaller social world.

However, in other cases social worlds are able to circumvent the values of larger society by creating their own internally validated values. For example, Wolkomir's (2001) study of gay and ex-gay Christian men illustrates the ways in which social worlds (in this case two different Christian support groups) are able to either help men deal with their sexuality in a way that displaces blame, or grants them freedom in sexuality by reinterpreting Christian society's norms and values. Wolkomir asserted that "examining how subordinate groups do revisionist ideological work likely will provide important insights into the social dynamics of inequality."

This same principle may be applied to heavier Danskin participants who, through participation, are able to re-write their stories about their bodies and thus make their

bodies acceptable. In Wolkomir's (2001) study, the gay Christian men reinterpreted The Bible in ways that allowed them to legitimize their sexuality and not regard it as a sin. In the Danskin experience, women may find that their training and racing groups allow them to reinterpret society's body image ideals in ways that allow them to be bigger but still very physically fit.

This process within social worlds of telling a new story and then allowing participants to fit themselves into that new story is a vital process to understand. Anthropologists call this process "narrating the self" and find that narrative functions as a "fundamental means of making sense of experience" and provides a "crucial resource for socializing emotions, attitudes, and identities" (Ochs & Capps, 1996, p. 19). Narratives shape how we feel about the world, and group narratives in particular encourage individuals to view their group narrative story as the master story (Ochs & Capps, 1996). More particular to social worlds, the "posing of an alternative account may be more effective in dismantling the status quo perspective than over critiques" (Ochs & Capps, 1996, p. 37). In other words, the group telling of an alternative reality may provide participants with more solace than they would gain by outwardly protesting the norm. Wolkomir's work with social worlds also finds that "effectively challenging a *dominant* (emphasis original) ideology require safe spaces wherein dissidents can develop, share, and elaborate an oppositional rhetoric among themselves" (p. 421). Indeed, Foucault believed that power is released through discourse, and so naturally a society will also have a "counter-discourse" (Shaw, 2001, p. 190). The Danskin

experience may provide just such a safe space for telling new stories, counter-discourses, about women's place in society and women's bodies.

Other manifestations of social worlds, such as Jonas' (1999) study of river guides, provide insights into exactly how social worlds or social organizations go about creating and acting out stories for themselves. Jonas' ethnographic work with river guides in the Grand Canyon highlights the importance of story telling in forming group identity and creating positions of power. In Jonas' study, river guides told stories to heighten their passengers sense of danger and therefore portray themselves (the river guides) as the authority figures who would lead the passengers to safety.

This concept is relevant and interesting to the current study both in terms of the stories that society tells about body and women's roles, and also because of the alternate story that Danskin organizers tell about body image and women's roles through promotional materials, race structure, and training groups. Similar to the river guides, Danskin promoters are able to orient women towards having fun, building camaraderie and feeling healthy and away from fixations on leanness, winning, and competition.

In fact, some recreation studies outside of the field of leisure studies have begun to hint at the importance of social worlds without calling them "social worlds." For example, we do know that it is more effective to exercise in a group than alone (Tantleff-Dunn & Agliata, 2001). A qualitative study of nearly 30 transsexuals participating in support groups found that group identity and support is very important in combating societal pressures to conform (Mason-Schrock, 1996).

Leisure and Identity

It is possible that the same sort of group identity is formed during group training programs, and that this identity may rest on ability and personality instead of body and weight. Indeed, the relationship between leisure and identity has been well documented. Haggard and Williams (1992) suggest that “Freely performed activities, such as leisure activities, influence ones self-perceptions more so than constrained behaviors” (p. 3). Hughes (1997) agrees that “Leisure activity, in particular, is considered to play an important role in the construction of individual identity” (p. 4). In fact, Hughes (1997) study of homosexual male tourists found that some participants only discovered their “authentic” identity in a leisure context. However, when the men returned to their everyday lives, their opportunities to continue this “authentic” identity were limited (Hughes, 1997).

Similarly, Kivel and Kleiber’s (2000) study of young gay high school students found that one may both explore and affirm identities via leisure activities. Further, they discovered that leisure provides opportunities for developing both a personal identity (one that is kept private and used only to affirm inner beliefs) and a social identity (one that is shared and acted upon publicly). Additionally, and even more relevant to the current study, Kivel and Kleiber (2000) discovered that young women used sports “as a way to resist narrowly prescribed gender roles and expectations” (p. 228). Indeed, Bialeschki (2004) states that leisure activities may provide women with “a space for reconstituting the self and rewriting the script of identity” (p. 17). Green (1998) goes further to say that “leisure as a site of identity construction and the re-working of

personal relationships is an underdeveloped area of study” (p. 171). Furthermore, the importance of women’s friendship and kin groups has been well documented and the study of such groups may indeed be studies of social worlds.

Leisure as Resistance

A study of women’s social worlds as agents of change, particularly women’s social worlds which are rooted in leisure activity, would be incomplete without an examination of the concept of leisure as resistance. Leisure as resistance is firmly rooted in the idea that because leisure is a personal choice, it is also a form of power control, and in the case of women’s leisure as resistance also transforms women into active agents who are in control of their lives and the stories they tell (Green, 1998).

Therefore, the study of leisure as resistance states that oppressed, underprivileged, or overlooked groups within society may use some form of leisure to counter societal norms (Bialeschki, 2004; Shaw, 2001). As Shaw (2001) noted, “It is oppressed or disadvantaged groups or individuals who are acting to change poor relations and gain personal or collective empowerment who are seen to exemplify resistance” (p. 188). In many cases, the oppressed or disadvantaged group being studied is women (Bialeschki, 2004; Green, 1998; Shaw, 2001) but this is not necessarily the case.

The concept of leisure as resistance is composed of three main components: collective versus individual resistance, outcomes of resistance, and the intentionality of resistance (Shaw, 2001). In answer to questions asking whether leisure as resistance has individual or collective effects, Shaw (2001) stated that it in fact has both. The study of

women's leisure as resistance has the potential to illustrate both individual empowerment as well as greater social or communal change. Bialeschki (2004) suggested that women who engage in leisure activities as resistance may be seen by other women who "may then be encouraged to participate in similar 'resistive behaviors' or at least question the societal assumptions about femininity [...]" (p. 15).

Resistance is composed of both individual acts that challenge everyday constraint and/or oppression as well as an examination of the oppression and constraints shared by communities of women (Shaw, 2001). Glover's (2003) study of resistance in the form of creating a community garden found both individual and communal resistance taking place. The community members involved in creating the garden were not only resisting the deterioration of their neighborhood, but were also able to "look at the events that led to the garden as evidence that they were something other than what outsiders saw them as" (p. 206). In Glover's study, community gardeners felt individually empowered because they personally were resisting stereotypes about their neighborhood and were fighting back against negative influences, but on the same token, the community as a whole felt a collective sense of power and progress as they communally took back their neighborhood (Glover, 2003).

Shaw (2001) also stated that the outcome and intentionality of resistance is not as important as the actual process. In other words, resistance may be unintentional and yet succeed at changing societal opinion, or it may be intentional and fail at creating societal change, and yet it is resistance nonetheless (Bialeschki, 2004). The important thing is that the study of leisure as resistance may help to further a greater understanding of

leisure as political practice, especially for minority or oppressed groups (Shaw, 2001). Indeed, leisure as resistance may help researchers to “develop perspectives that attempt to deconstruct power and difference, without abstracting them from a politics rooted in women’s difference and common interests” (Green, 1998, p. 173).

Leisure is, in fact, a prime arena for political expression as it is an aspect of social life in which power is brokered and norms and ideologies are questioned all within view of the media (Shaw, 2001). Indeed, if one feels as structuralists do that societal ideologies function to make power inequities seem natural and normal, then the history of women in sports would provide a fertile ground for examining such normalizing ideologies and their changes over time. Bialeschki (2004) called leisure spaces “heterotopias for struggle against and resistance to domination of the self and inferiorized subjectivities” (p. 17). She went on to state that leisure may provide a “personal space for resistance to domination, a space where there is room for the self to expand beyond what it is told it should be” (Bialeschki, 2004, p. 17). Shaw (2001) stated that the very freedom of many leisure settings may in fact make them “prime locations for resistance activities” (p. 186). Furthermore, due to the representational nature of leisure and its ongoing relationship with the media, leisure participants may have the capacity to reproduce or resist dominant ideologies quite visibly (Shaw, 2001).

The study of leisure as a political arena is still controversial as it requires the dismissal of the idea of leisure as innocent fun and relaxation. Therefore, Shaw (2001) found, examining resistance as a possible outcome of leisure behavior requires the belief that leisure is more than innocent play or sport, indeed one must acknowledge that

leisure behavior may be political as well. Individual empowerment through leisure, for example, may empower others in similar situations and in doing so provide not only individual benefits but collective benefits as well. In this way, resistance is both individual and collective and may bring benefits for both. These outcomes bring leisure beyond innocence and into the realm of political activity. For example, in Glover's (2003) community garden study, he found that the community gardeners used their garden success story to strengthen their collective identity.

To gain a better understanding of this phenomenon, Shaw (2001) calls for the documentation of leisure activities where resistance is taking place and a focus on what is being resisted. While the traditional resistance framework calls for an examination of traditionally oppressed groups, some variations of this have also been successful such as Glover's (2003) study among well educated whites. In the end, however, most resistance scholars agree that only "collective action can effectively generate lasting social change" (Henderson, 1996, p. 151). One form of collective action may be leisure as resistance within distinct social worlds.

Most Effective Programs

Frederickson and Roberts (1997) suggest that one way to help women fight against objectification is to create opportunities for them to be active and in control of their lives (Frederickson & Roberts, 1997). One option for doing this, they determine, is through physical activity or recreation. In other words, sport may help women to develop agency and an internal locus of control. However, they do not spell out

specifics of this program or ways to make it most effective. Therefore, an examination of the Danskin program specifically will begin to shed light on programming for women's emotional and psychological health in general and body image issues specifically.

A study by Parsons and Betz (2001) also found positive durable benefits for women's participation in recreation. In a study of 195 male and female students, and then a subsequent study of 437 college women, the researchers attempted to determine the relationship between sports participation and self-objectification, instrumentality, and locus of control. They found that while certain weight-dependent sports actually created more body shame in women than non-participation in sports, sport was positively linked to instrumentality and internal locus of control. This suggests, like the Frederickson and Roberts study (1997) that sport participation at a non-elite (i.e. for fun, not for serious competition), non-weight dependent level, is capable of boosting women's self image (Parsons & Betz, 2001). Again, they do not outline, beyond non-weight dependent, what sorts of activities are best. Here again, a study of all the components of the Danskin program, and not just the physical rigors, will allow for holistic look at positive ways to program for women.

As of yet, however, no one has determined what sorts of programs are most beneficial to helping women overcome body image dissatisfaction. In fact, many researchers indicate that more study is needed to link sports participation and facets of body image (Parsons & Betz, 2001).

Summary

In order to most effectively and holistically study the emotional and psychological benefits of the Danskin triathlon and training programs it is necessary to combine the basic research in body image and overall emotional and psychological benefits along with frameworks of social worlds, narrative theory, and leisure as resistance. This methodology provides insight into women's leisure as a site of political resistance, identity formation, and communal kinship.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

This chapter is divided into four sections. The first section describes the two separate study sites as well as the Danskin triathlon itself. The second section discusses my study methods. The third section highlights my interview methods and techniques. The final section describes the analysis methods I used in this study.

Site Information

Most of the women interviewed for this study were former and current participants in two different Danskin training programs located in Austin, Texas: Tough Cookies Don't Crumble and Iron Chicks. Other interviewees included two women trained by an Iron Chicks coach using the Iron Chicks training program as well as several coaches for both the Iron Chicks and Tough Cookies Don't Crumble programs as well as one woman who has been involved in Danskin as a participant, race committee member and coach since 1997. Both the Iron Chicks and Tough Cookies Don't Crumble (TCDC) programs are run as private businesses unrelated to the Danskin clothing company. See Table I for more information on each interviewee.

Austin Danskin Triathlon

The Danskin triathlon has been occurring nationally every triathlon season for fourteen years, and has been held in Austin, Texas for the past 12 years. The race is sponsored by the Danskin clothing company, makers of women's dance and athletic

TABLE I : Table of Participants

Name	Description
Eleanor	Eleanor is sixty-one years old. She is a retired school teacher, married, and the mother of grown children. She began triathlon training three years ago with Tough Cookies and she is now training for Nationals in triathlon. She is originally from South America. Her husband is now also a triathlete.
Jane	Jane is thirty-two years old. She is a lawyer, married, and does not have children. She began triathlon training two years ago with Iron Chicks. She is now running both triathlons and marathons. She is Caucasian.
Frida	Frida is in her thirties. She is a coach for the Tough Cookies training group, married, and has young children. She started with Tough Cookies three years ago. She currently coaches Tough Cookies and trains for Ironman competitions full-time. She is originally from Mexico.
Elizabeth	Elizabeth is in her mid-thirties. She is a coach for Iron Chicks training group, unmarried with no children. She started with Iron Chicks three years ago. She currently coaches for Rogue Training full-time. She is Caucasian.
Eve	Eve is in her thirties. She is a coach for Team Danskin, TriZones, and a member of several Danskin race committees. She is married with a young child. Her involvement with Danskin Austin began in 1997 as a participant. She now coaches several triathlon training groups. She is Caucasian.
Lucille	Lucille is forty-three years old. She is employed, married, and has children. She started training with Tough Cookies three years ago. She plans on only racing the Danskin triathlon in the future. She is Caucasian.
Carly	Carly is thirty-seven years old. She works for a computer company and she is married with two children. She began training with Tough Cookies two years ago. She now races the Danskin as well as other triathlons. Her husband is also a triathlete. She is Caucasian.
Alice	Alice is thirty-five, recently remarried, and does not have children. She began training with Iron Chicks two years ago. She is now a volunteer coach for Iron Chicks and continues to run the Danskin Austin race each year. She is Caucasian.
Courtney	Courtney is thirty-eight years old, recently remarried, and the mother of both grown and young children. She began training with Iron Chicks two years ago. She also participates in other Rogue Training programs. Her husband is a swimmer. She is Caucasian.
Frances	Frances is in her mid-thirties, divorced and has a young child. She began training with a year ago. She has since participated in other triathlons in Texas. She is Caucasian.
Mary	Mary is thirty years old, married, and trained and raced for the Danskin while she was six months pregnant. She began training with Iron Chicks two years ago. She will race the Danskin again in June of 2005. She is Caucasian.
Florence	Florence is twenty-nine years old. She is an unmarried young professional with no children. She began training with an Iron Chicks coach last year. She will train and race again this year. She is Caucasian.
Michelle	Michelle is thirty-three years old. She is married and expecting her second child. She began training with Tough Cookies last year. She is Chinese-American.
Stephanie	Stephanie is in her mid-thirties. She is married and does not have children. She began coaching for Iron Chicks three years ago. She continues to coach for Rogue Training and train for Ironman competitions. She also coached Florence and Rhonda independently. She is Caucasian.
Rhonda	Rhonda is in her late twenties. She is unmarried and does not have any children. She began training with an Iron Chicks coach last year. She is also Florence's training partner. She is Caucasian.

wear. The company uses the event as a fundraiser for breast cancer with proceeds going to the Susan G. Komen breast cancer fund.

Danskin organizers claim that the race series as a whole is the longest running multi-sport series in the world. In Texas, the Austin Danskin race is the largest triathlon in the state, larger even than the co-ed triathlons held around the same time. In 2004, over 3,500 women competed in a variety of categories including individual, relays, cancer survivor categories, and the new “just for fun” division which encourages women to participate not for time but to be with friends and loved ones (there are no age groups in this category so a 55 year old mom can compete with her 15 year old daughter).

Over 100,000 women have competed in the nationwide Danskin series since 1990 at one of more than eight race sites nationwide on race dates that vary from late May until early September. Women aged fourteen years and up compete in a variety of age and skill-level classes including “First Timers,” “Elites,” and “Cancer Survivors.” The race itself is a sprint distance triathlon which means that it consists of a half-mile swim, 12 mile bike, and 3.2 mile (5K) run. Upon completion of the race, every participant gets a medal.

The Danskin series, including the specific Austin Danskin race, is quite different from other triathlon series or individual races. The Danskin triathlon does not divide participants into weight classes. In many triathlons, women who weight over 145 pounds are grouped together in the “Athena” class and race separately from women who weigh less than 145 pounds. There is no Athena class in the Danskin series.

The Danskin organizers also allow women more support and help than is allowed in other triathlon races. For example, women who are nervous about swimming may use a “water noodle” on the course and are guided around the swim course by volunteer swimmers sponsored by Dove soap called “Dove Swim Angels.” This amount of help would be against regulations at many other triathlons. Additionally, certified bike mechanics patrol the course and offer supplies and assistance to women experiencing technical difficulties with their bikes on the course. Again, receiving or giving help in many other triathlon races results in disqualification of the individuals involved.

Furthermore, Danskin organizers provide a lot of pre-race support and assistance to women who wish to compete. They organize free pre-race training seminars, Team Survivor training for cancer survivors, Danskin Mentor Mentee programs, Camp Danskin, e-mail training, and Team Danskin Training. Danskin triathlon’s spokeswoman, Sally Edwards, a former professional triathlete, always finishes last so that no participant will place last. In many ways, the training programs designed around the Danskin triathlon also focus on the same themes of non-competitiveness, group effort, and fun environment.

Tough Cookies Don’t Crumble

Tough Cookies Don’t Crumble (TCDC Fitness Inc) is an Austin-based triathlon training program whose mission statement is “to empower and motivate women of all ages to lead healthier lifestyles by providing multi-sport and fitness training in a fun, friendly, non-competitive, goal-oriented manner” (“Tough Cookies Don’t Crumble,”

2002). On the front page of their website is the slogan “It’s not what your body looks like; it’s what it can do” (“Tough Cookies Don’t Crumble,” 2002).

TCDC was started by two stay-at-home moms, Frida and her best friend Jackie who were training for a triathlon at their neighborhood country club. The club’s owner saw them training and asked them to develop a training program for ten other members to help them prepare for the Danskin triathlon. Frida and Jackie designed a successful program and decided to pursue triathlon coaching as a part-time career. Both gained several professional certifications, started a corporation (TCDC Inc.) and finally Frida became sole owner of what is now a three year old corporation that is entirely women-run, and employs five coaches and one assistant coach. All coaches are triathletes and are certified by USA Triathlon (USAT), American Council on Exercise (ACE) or USA Cycling (USAC). TCDC is the self-proclaimed first and original all-women’s triathlon training program in the Austin area.

TCDC provides 8-week long triathlon training for specific race events, including the Austin Danskin triathlon. In preparation for each these events, TCDC provides three coached sessions a week, personalized weekly training schedules for each athlete, a triathlon manual and training log, and special clinics and seminars on topics ranging from skill building for the open water swim, nutrition pre, during and post race, and even how to fix a flat bicycle tire.

In addition to these race-oriented offerings, TCDC also hosts a mini-triathlon and picnic and a post-race party. TCDC positions itself as a teambuilding, non-competitive training group for women by women, and so community-building social events are an

important part of this image. Additionally, as TCDC is for women by women, the training center also provides a choice of workouts for those who stay at home during the day and those who work outside the home. They allow their trainees to bring their children in running strollers to running workouts and also provide childcare during their swim training days. The program costs \$195 for new participants and \$175 for returning participants.

Iron Chicks

The Iron Chicks training program is run by Rogue Training Systems and sponsored by RunTex Runner's Store, a local Austin running shop. The program began within RunTex in the former RunTex University. Once RunTex decided to discontinue its classes, Rogue Training was born and took over many of the old training programs. Included in this takeover was the Iron Chicks program. As a result, Rogue Training coaches are in charge of Iron Chicks programs as well as a variety of other training programs including marathon training, 5 and 10K training classes and duathlon classes. Both men and women coach for Iron Chicks, and all coaches have an extensive running, swimming or cycling background and are often serious competitors in all or one of those sports. Like TCDC, Iron Chicks has been in existence for three years. Prior to 2002, the program was called Women Tri.

Iron Chicks is a 10 week training course to prepare women for the Austin Danskin triathlon. The class meets three days per week, once for each discipline (swim, bike, run) and provides a series of evening and weekend times so as best to serve women's schedules. Iron Chicks organizers provide at least one expert coach per sport

and one assistant coach per 20-25 triathletes. They do this to try and provide each triathlete with the maximum amount of contact with a coach.

Rogue Training provides workouts for both experienced and beginning triathletes; however they consider their target market to be beginning triathletes. As a result, Iron Chicks trainees may sign up for either beginner or advanced levels of swimming, biking and/or running dependent on their ability level. This flexibility allows women to feel comfortable with varying abilities in each of the three sports.

Study Methods

This study utilized qualitative research methods to examine and explore women's experiences in both Iron Chicks and Tough Cookies Don't Crumble training programs. Coaches and Danskin insiders were also consulted to provide information about training programs and the Danskin environment. According to Patton (1990), qualitative methods provide a holistic approach for studying certain social phenomena as a whole. In using these methods, researchers search for the unifying nature of things and attempt understand social phenomena as a complex system instead of a sum of parts. Patton continues by asserting that qualitative researchers must "[assume] that a description and understanding of a person's social environment or an organization's political context is essential for understanding what is being observed" (p. 49).

As such, qualitative findings are longer, more detailed and more variable in content than the data derived from purely quantitative methods. As Patton (1990) stated,

“Qualitative analysis allows us to see the world as viewed by participants, and determine point of view without pre-selecting for it with questions” (p. 24).

Qualitative methods were particularly applicable to this study because they allowed for detailed information gathering from a small group of women. In particular to this study is Patton’s (1990) assertion that “Qualitative research is like political action as the depth of participants’ feelings are revealed” (p. 19). Collecting information of this kind was particularly vital to this study as part of its purpose is to examine women’s leisure as political expression.

As this study utilized qualitative research methods, the data consisted of transcribed interviews as well as the websites of each of the training programs and of the Danskin triathlon itself. I also participated in the 2005 Austin Danskin as a Dove Swim Angel and used my observations to help formulate the sections of the study dealing with the atmosphere of the actual Austin Danskin triathlon. This information, as suggested by Patton (1990) was then organized into a readable narrative description consisting of major themes, categories and illustrative case examples extracted through content analysis.

Grounded Theory

Many types of qualitative methods exist, and each provides the researcher with a particular way of collecting and examining qualitative data. This study in particular utilized grounded theory methods as described by Glaser and Strauss (1967).

Grounded theory was developed by Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss in the 1960's. Very simply put, grounded theory is the discovery of theory through data. Glaser and Strauss felt that social scientists had gotten too concerned with the "rhetoric of validation" and were trying to prove theories before they even had data to go along with them. In other words, researchers were trying to fit data into theory instead of other way around (Glaser and Strauss, 1967 p. 16). Glaser and Strauss' "grounded theory" was proposed as a method of data collection which would help to counter this trend.

In particular, grounded theory "serves to provide relevant predictions, explanations, interpretations and applications" inspired by instead of forced upon qualitative data (Glaser and Strauss, 1967 p. 1). After all, Glaser and Strauss (1967) asserted, theory that comes from real data usually cannot be completely refuted, even in light of new data. They continued, "Generating a theory from data means that most hypotheses and concepts not only come from the data, but are systematically worked out in relation to the data during the course of research" (p. 6).

In order to generate grounded theory in the way that Glaser and Strauss outlined, constant comparison and theoretical sampling methods must work in tandem, you cannot have one without the other (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Indeed, one guides the other in a sort of feedback loop. This process, as it applies specifically to this study, will be further outlined in the *Methods of Analysis* section.

Method of Data Collection

Sampling Procedures

Informants for this study were selected by contacting coaches for both the Iron Chicks and Tough Cookies Don't Crumble programs and asking them to contact former participants (usually going back 1-2 years) via email listservs. The coaches' emails to former participants contained my contact information, a brief synopsis of the study, and then asked them to contact me if they wished to participate. Then, as recommended by Glaser and Strauss, (1967), I used purposive sampling techniques in order to target further informants and gain greater knowledge about specific areas brought to my attention during the first interviews.

As Patton (1990) stated, purposive sampling allows the researcher to select info-rich cases for studying a phenomenon in-depth. Many purposive sampling techniques exist, but two in particular were used to gather information for this study: snowball sampling and Theory-based/Operational Construct Sampling. Snowball sampling is used for locating info-rich key informants. Key informants are identified by asking well-situated people to list the names of others who know a lot about a certain topic, in this case others who fully participated in Iron Chicks or TCDC training programs. Key names should keep coming up, and those are the people who will be asked for an interview. I used Theory-based/Operational Construct Sampling which, according to Patton (1990) is the normal, basic research version of criterion sampling. "You sample based on people's potential manifestation or representation of important theoretical constructs. The sample becomes, by definition, representative of the phenomenon of

interest” (p. 177). This variety of sampling methods resulted in a total sample of fifteen women, including participants, coaches, and one Danskin insider.

This sample size is considered acceptable by the standards put forth by grounded theory methods. Using grounded theory methods requires that researchers come to theoretical sampling through joint analysis and collection of data. The depth of theoretical sampling necessary depends on the amount of data collected on a group and on a category (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). As such, qualitative interview techniques utilizing purposive sampling often result in a smaller sample size. However, as Patton (1990) noted, “A smaller sample of open-ended interviews adds depth, detail and meaning at a personal level of experience” (p. 18). Indeed, using grounded theory means that sample size itself is ruled by the principles of the theory. As a result, one often requires fewer samples (interviews) in order to make a valid point.

Instead of striving for large samples of data, grounded theory asks the researcher to strive for theoretical saturation, which means that “No additional data are being found whereby the sociologist can develop properties of [her] category” (Glaser and Strauss, 1967 p. 61). In other words, theoretical saturation is when the same or similar instances are mentioned over and over by multiple participants. When one category is saturated, nothing remains but to go on to new groups for data on other categories and attempt to saturate those too. Theoretical saturation was reached by the time interview fifteen of this study was conducted.

However, saturation can never be achieved by studying one incident in one group; only maximizing the differences among groups creates theory (Glaser and

Strauss, 1967). This is the reason that more than one triathlon training group was chosen for this study.

Group Selection

Grounded theory, by definition, requires the examination of more than one group pertaining to the social phenomenon of interest. Indeed, groups are essential for the “constant comparison” component of grounded theory. As Glaser and Strauss (1967) asserted, comparison groups provide both control over the two scales of generality: conceptual level and population scope, as well as “provide simultaneous maximization or minimization of both the differences and similarities of data that bear on the categories being studied” (p. 55). In this way, comparison groups enable the social scientist to uncover categories in her data as well as control its theoretical relevance (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). As Glaser and Strauss (1967) pointed out, “The scope of a substantive theory can be carefully increased and controlled by conscious choices of groups” (p. 52). In other words, the careful selection of comparison groups will help determine the generalizability of the researcher’s study.

Therefore, in choosing groups for multiple comparisons, the researcher using grounded theory methods must remember that the main purpose of her study is to generate theory and not to verify facts. Indeed, like other parts of a grounded theory study, the choice of groups for comparison must be done in an ongoing process (Glaser and Strauss, 1967 p. 48).

However, one’s main criteria for group selection should be that group’s theoretical relevance for furthering the development of emerging categories. The

researcher should seek a group that will help to generate as many of the categories as possible and that will help relate categories to each other and to their properties. To select these sorts of groups, the researcher needs to be clear on the basic types of groups that she wishes to compare (Glaser and Strauss, 1967 p. 52).

This particular study examined the impact of all-women's Danskin Austin triathlon training groups on their participants. As such, two popular programs, Iron Chicks and Tough Cookies Don't Crumble, were selected for comparison. In order to complete this particular study, it was not determined that further groups would be needed for sampling. Indeed, no distinct differences were found between participants of the two study groups. These groups, like the sport of triathlon itself, consisted mainly of white, middle to upper class participants often with children and often married.

Indeed, triathlon as a sport is quite classed. As an article about triathlon and socioeconomics in *Real Sports Magazine* asserts, "[In particular, two members of the US triathlon elite] represent the true upper-middle-class demographic of triathletes in this country. [Karen Smyers of the U.S.] attended Princeton, [while Barb Lindquist, a top ranked US triathlete, went] to Stanford." Indeed, the editor-in-chief of *Triathlete* magazine is quoted by *Real Sports Magazine* as saying that, "the average triathlete is a prototypical yuppie in her or his thirties, with an average income of about \$90,000 a year. Equipment is costly, with specialized triathlon bicycles running anywhere between \$1,000 and \$5,000." 1997 Ironman champion Heather Fuhr agrees as she states that triathlon draws a crowd that, "has a fair bit of money to throw around" (Goth, 2000, p. not available).

Interviewing

In-depth interviews were used to gather data from former participants and current coaches from the Iron Chicks and TCDC programs. These interviews were conducted beginning in February 2005. Participants ranged in age from their late twenties to early sixties. Coaches were mostly in their mid-thirties. All participants were women, and as in the sport of triathlon itself, the majority of participants were white and middle to upper income. However, one interviewee was Central American and one Asian.

The coaches interviewed for this study were female, majority white (one head coach was Mexican), and majority middle to upper income. Two coaches received their primary income from coaching while two others had additional jobs or money from other sources.

Each interview was tape recorded and subsequently transcribed only by the principal investigator. Participants chose the location of the interview according to their comfort and work schedules. Interviews were conducted over a two and a half month period in Austin, Texas. Each interview lasted approximately forty minutes to an hour and a half.

As described by Patton (1990), I utilized an interview guide approach to format the interviews. The General Interview Guide approach requires that the researcher determine a set of issues to be explored with each respondent before interviewing begins. However, there is no pre-set order to address each issue and no wording precisely determined ahead of time. The interview guide serves as a basic checklist to ensure that researchers cover the same information with each respondent but are able to

adapt the wording and sequence to each individual interview. “The Interview Guide makes interviewing across a number of different people more systematic and comprehensive by delimiting in advance the issues to be explored” (Patton, 1990 p. 283).

As such, the interview guide topics used in this study focused mainly on the importance of the Danskin training camps to women, their sense of community with other female participants and coaches, their feelings about themselves psychologically before and after participation, their feelings about their bodies before and after participation, the influence of their families on their leisure activities, their feelings about the Danskin race itself, and their feelings about Western society’s ideal for women. Examples of questions include “What did participation in a Danskin training program mean to you? Did you feel closeness with other women in the training program? How did you feel about your body before you began the program? How did you feel about your body immediately after the training program? How do you feel about your body now? Do you feel pressure from society to look or act a certain way? Did participation in your training program mitigate these feelings at all?”

Quality of Data

According to Patton (1990), credibility and accuracy are improved with systematic data collection procedures, multiple data sources, triangulation, external reviews and admitting and being aware of biases. All of these techniques were utilized during the data collection and data analysis phases of this study.

Triangulation, as defined by Patton (1990), is the combination of methods in the study of the same phenomenon or program. Triangulation enhances data quality and credibility because it shows that the researcher is open to other ways of looking at things and prevents the study from failing just because one method is weak (Patton, 1990 p193). However, there are several types of triangulation. In 1978, Denzin, for example, listed four types of triangulation: data, investigator, theory, and methodological (Patton, 1990). This particular study incorporated data triangulation by utilizing data gleaned from personal interviews, personal program experience, and program websites. I also used investigator triangulation by asking an advisor to review the transcribed interviews I collected and suggest a list of coding themes. This advisor was male, previously unaware of the Danskin triathlon, and uninvolved in the project up until he began independently reviewing the data. Nevertheless, the themes suggested by this advisor closely resembled the themes that I also developed.

Patton (1990) also encouraged the search for negative cases, cases that do not fit the pattern. The search for negative cases may allow the researcher to openly consider many possible explanations for a phenomenon before recommending one as the most reasonable. Patton (1990) believed that by dealing openly with complexities and dilemmas posed by negative cases the credibility and validity of a researcher's work may be heightened. As such, I openly sought negative cases throughout the interview process. It was difficult to track down former participants who did not like their triathlon training programs because many of these participants dropped out of the programs and did not leave contact information with coaches or program leaders.

However, I did find one dissatisfied participant who was willing to discuss her experiences. I encouraged her to discuss the negative aspects of her experience and asked her to recommend other interviewees similar to herself. She was unable to provide any further contacts.

Bernard's (2000) suggestions for conducting face-to-face interviews were taken into account so as to minimize threats to accuracy. Bernard (2000) suggested that researchers conduct face-to-face interviews because they allow the interviewer to control the pace, progress and order of questions within the interview as well as allow for clarification and more in-depth information where needed. As such, I did not conduct initial interviews via email or telephone.

Furthermore, I was the only investigator conducting the face-to-face interviews for this study. Bernard (2000) suggested that this method of data collection provides for greater consistency. Indeed, Bernard (2000) found that the main potential threat to the accuracy of face-to-face interview data is *reactivity*. Reactivity consists of "subtly telling the respondent how you hope he or she will answer your questions" (Bernard, p. 231, 2000). Ways to minimize reactivity risks include being aware of reactivity and consciously self-monitoring as well as using only one interviewer so as to introduce only one set of biases. While reactivity can likely not be eliminated, awareness of it and structures to reduce it will help ensure data accuracy. I remained aware of my own biases while conducting interviews and made every effort to eliminate them from my questions and reactions.

Researcher Bias

Patton (1990) recognized that a researcher's particular biases towards and feelings about his or her subject matter will influence the data. In order to minimize this influence, he suggested that researchers admit their biases and avoid setting out to prove any certain hypothesis. At the same time, he recognized that subjectivity is inevitable, and therefore asked researchers to be honest about the fact that their findings constitute a perspective rather than an absolute truth (Patton, 1990).

As a former Iron Chicks participant who had a very positive and empowering experience in the training program, I am aware of my positive feelings towards the Danskin Austin race as well as the Iron Chicks training program. As such, I made every effort possible to remain neutral during interviews and when analyzing the data I collected. I did not attempt to validate my own positive experience during Danskin training, but instead I strived to be open and receptive to the individual experiences of the women I interviewed.

As such, I do not feel that my personal biases negatively affected the results of this study. Indeed, Patton (1990) states that bias should not be a concern to qualitative researchers as he finds that detachment towards one's subject matter is not necessarily helpful. Instead Patton (1990) maintains that distance is no guarantee of objectivity. Therefore, I remain honest about my biases and ask the audience to be aware that "Researcher's feelings, perceptions, experiences and outcomes are part of the data" (Patton, 1990 p. 58).

Clarity about Purpose

Another method for creating accurate and valid data is being clear about ones research purpose. This particular study falls under the category of what Patton (1990) calls “Basic Research” whose purpose is to generate knowledge for the sake of knowledge, generate new theories, and further our understanding of a particular social construct. It is an exploratory study in nature and does not attempt to make generalizing statements about female triathlon trainees.

Method of Analysis

Theoretical Sampling and Constant Comparison

As required by grounded theory methods, constant comparison and theoretical sampling were used in tandem to simultaneously collect and analyze the data for this study. As Glaser and Strauss (1967) assert, the collection, coding and analysis of data must be done jointly and are the underlying operations for theory generation.

Theoretical sampling by definition is an on-going process of data collection which is utilized to generate theory. To use theoretical sampling correctly, analysts must jointly collect, code and analyze their data and then decide which data to collect next and where to find that data in order to develop their theory as it emerges. Therefore, in theoretical sampling, the process of data collection is controlled by the emerging theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). As such, theoretical sampling requires that the initial decisions for theoretical collection of data be based on a general sociological perspective or general subject or problem area and not on a preconceived theoretical framework.

Therefore, with theoretical sampling one may begin research with a few partial frameworks or “local concepts” but one does not need to know the relevancy of these concepts to the problem as this will emerge through further data collection and analysis (Glaser and Strauss, 1967).

Constant comparison, which must be used jointly with theoretical sampling, is the term used to describe this method of joint data coding, collection, and analysis. Constant comparison is concerned with generating and plausibly suggesting (but not testing) many categories, properties, and hypotheses about a general problem (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). In other words, constant comparison/theoretical sampling are not designed to test specific theories; rather they will “produce many hypotheses synthesized at different levels of generality” (Glaser and Strauss, 1967 p. 102).

Coding the Data

A constant comparison process was used to analyze transcribed interviews and generate common themes. Transcriptions were each be read once to identify and then code possible themes, and then read again to make sure that these themes make sense compared to one another and truly fit the data. In accordance with constant comparison/theoretical sampling, additional data was collected as necessary. Then, a final reading of the transcripts ensured that no new themes were needed and that all themes were relevant to each other and truly representative of the data.

The Finished Product

As determined by Glaser and Strauss (1967), the constant comparison/theoretical sampling method is on-going, and in reporting findings, researchers are simply reporting on the work “so far.” Therefore, I present grounded theories about women participants in Austin Danskin triathlon training groups as generated by the data that I have collected so far. Glaser and Strauss (1967) suggest that “when you begin to hypothesize with the express intent of generation theory, you are no longer a passive receiver of impressions but are now drawn to verifying your hypothesis through the comparison of groups. Developing interrelations between hypotheses forms the core of your emerging theory. The core becomes the theoretical guide to the further collection and analysis of data.” As such, “A discovered, grounded theory will tend to combine mostly concepts and hypotheses that have emerged from the data with some existing ones that are clearly useful” (Glaser and Strauss, 1967 p. 46). The emphasis is on illumination, understanding, and extrapolation rather than casual determination, prediction and generalization (Patton, 1990).

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

The original intent of this study was to determine if participation in Austin Danskin training programs and the Danskin race itself affected women's views about their bodies; and indeed during the course of interviews it became apparent that the participant's feelings about their bodies did change. However, the data also revealed another and equally important result of Danskin Austin training and racing: women were building a social world within the training programs and their involvement in this social world influenced their experience in terms of their body image, sense of community, and definition of sport. Therefore, this results section will focus not only on Austin Danskin training programs' effects on participant's body image but also the community building that occurred within the triathlon training groups and among Danskin participants as a whole and the effects that this community had on participants in terms of body image, perceptions of sport, and other areas.

Findings from this study are presented first in the form of three unifying themes: *Initial Involvement*, *Community Building*, and *Resistance*. This format provides a way of telling a story with the data which allows for an exploration of multiple and equally important themes. However, this prevailing story is then held together by one primary thread: Danskin training and racing participants form a social world that allows them to redefine their bodies and redefine the tenets of organized sport. The exploration of this

prevailing theme will shed light on the importance of community within Austin Danskin triathlon training groups and will be generally favorable in nature.

However, an alternate to this story will also be presented as a way of exploring the negative cases discovered during data collection. This section will explore the data that deviated from the typical positive Danskin story and will serve to provide depth and breadth of data analysis. This section will focus on lukewarm Danskin experiences as witnessed or lived by participants and coaches. Most of this type of data was collected from experienced triathletes and coaches who view Danskin and Danskin training through a different lens than the beginners.

Finally, in piecing together the story of Austin Danskin trainees, it became apparent that the women themselves often best articulate each aspect of the tale. As a result, the participant's own words will be used liberally throughout this section to allow their clear and unedited voices to tell their own story.

A Typical Austin Danskin Trainee's Story

Initial Involvement

It is important to begin the story of Austin Danskin trainees by exploring why women joined the training groups in the first place. To examine these motivations, one must understand the characteristics of the women typically involved in these programs. For most of the participants, their first Danskin training program was also their first experience training for an organized athletic competition (as opposed to working out for fitness in a gym). It was also, for many of them, their first experience participating in

organized sports as an adult. Some participants had been on the swim team or taken P.E. as children, but had not pursued organized recreation opportunities as adults.

As such, most participants' main goals for entering the training program were simply to finish the Austin Danskin race and to have fun doing it. These women had generally heard about the Danskin from family and friends, gotten a "wild hair," and decided to race. Similarly, the coaches of these programs recognized that their main clientele were beginners, and so they geared their programs towards assisting participants in comfortably and enjoyably finishing the Austin Danskin race. The coaches also, as was suggested during interviews, hoped to create a lifelong habit of exercise among their female trainees. They placed great value on general fitness and fostering an enjoyment of sport and recreational activity and were much less concerned with how their trainees were placing in the race. In fact, none of the coaches interviewed expressed concern about their trainee's times or rankings in the race; but all the coaches expressed the hope that their trainees would go on to participate in subsequent triathlons, running events, swimming events or other athletic endeavors.

Although the Austin Danskin also serves as a fundraiser for breast cancer, only one interviewee for this study mentioned that fact as one of many reasons that she wanted to become involved in the event. The rest of the participants never mentioned breast cancer fundraising as having anything to do with their decision to run or train for Danskin. In fact, none of the other participants mentioned breast cancer fundraising at any time during their interviews.

This background information is important to keep in mind while examining the results of this study as these characteristics helped to shape the data that was uncovered.

Motivations

Most Austin Danskin training participants joined their training groups for social reasons. Some joined because their friends wanted to join, others joined to meet friends, but the shared reason for becoming involved in training programs was a social one.

Frances reported,

I just kind of intuitively know that if I want to make the most of this experience I want to do it with a bunch of other people and have a full, complete experience [...] part of the experience I was looking for was to be in a group of women [with whom I could identify].

Women sought a social network from training because they felt that camaraderie, support and a common goal would be important to having a positive first triathlon experience. Frances again explained,

Joining the group in itself I did with the expectation that if I'm gonna do a triathlon I want to make my first experience as great an experience as I can knowing the being with a group of other women, to have that female bonding experience, which actually I don't have a lot of experience with in life and I've only lately come to appreciate.

Carly was unusual in that she had done a few triathlons before she signed up to train for the Danskin. She remembered,

The thing that I noticed when I went to races [was that] I really didn't know anybody. [I'd] see people talking to other people "Hey, how ya doing?" that kind of stuff. [...] So I'd be going down [to the race site] in the morning myself and didn't really know anybody or a lot of people [...] so I really signed up for the workout groups to meet more people that were interested in sport because I think it's harder, there's just not a lot of women doing it so its harder to just casually get to meet them unless you throw yourself into something were you

meet a whole bunch of them. So I really joined Tough Cookies not as much for the workouts but more for the social aspect.

Indeed, many of the trainees interviewed for this study were not involved in sports before they participated in Austin Danskin training programs. Once these women heard about the triathlon (almost exclusively in this study they learned about it from friends) they researched training programs and found that the welcoming atmosphere and ready availability of training programs eased their fears about participating in something as potentially intimidating as a triathlon and helped them gain the courage and confidence to take the first step and join a training program. Alice recalled seeing a flyer for the Iron Chicks program at a local running store:

My husband picked up [the flyer] and handed it to me and I was very sad because I didn't know how to swim and I kept telling [my husband] I can't do this training because I can't swim. And I'd been talking for over a year about doing a triathlon and he handed me that flyer and so I finally got in touch with the swim coach and told her what my problem was, that I really couldn't swim, and she said "No problem, we can get you swimming the distance you need to between now and then, not an issue."

Lucille recalled a similar situation:

[I got involved because] people just kept talking about [Danskin]. [I kept hearing that] it was fun, it was fun to train, it was fun to do, it was all-women, it was competitive but not competitive like it would be if men were in the group. It would be a good time to do a first triathlon, it would be one of the best ones you could do.

As illustrated by Alice and Lucille's experiences, the Austin Danskin training programs examined in this study have a reputation for being accessible and beginner-friendly. This reputation appears to help women who do not have an athletic

background but decide to take on a challenge feel comfortable training for the Austin Danskin.

A few participants also became involved in triathlon training because of an initial desire to lose weight. This motivation was often secondary and indeed often served as the women's reason for becoming involved in exercise in general but perhaps not triathlon training specifically. For example, Frida recalled that "a lot of women were interested in losing weight and that was one of the reasons why they decided to do triathlons." Indeed, participants themselves recalled getting involved in general exercise to lose weight, as Mary stated,

I started exercising because I got married and gained a bunch of weight, I don't know, I was happy and I wasn't paying attention to anything but [my weekly "Date Night" with my husband] and so I gained all this weight. [As a result of the weight gain] I started exercising but I was doing all like aerobics classes and things like that and from there some of the friends I was exercising with started [talking about joining a Danskin training program] and I just started thinking about it and I was like "Well, it's not that crazy, well I could try it, well I don't know," you know I used the elliptical trainer maybe I could run a little bit, I could try running, and we just got started. We started really slow and from there one of my girlfriends found the Iron Chicks program and we signed up.

Courtney recounted a similar story:

I started, gosh, about five years ago and I lost about seventy pounds and I did it just by running. And it was with this group from RunTex, I was living out in Hayes County and [a RunTex coach] started a running group out in Hayes County with the support of RunTex and [...] and so when they said we have a training group coming up, Iron Chicks, and you know everybody was kinda, a friend at work was kinda razzin' me because she was going to do it and we're the same age and we're old and she was going to do it and she wanted me to do it and I have a friend that was like "come on, you can do it too."

However, these women's main motivation for participating in the triathlon training itself was to be with friends and perhaps also to try something new and

challenging while their original motivation for beginning exercise programs was to lose weight.

Many participants were also motivated to join training programs because these programs provided them with a special time away from their daily lives. Jane indicated that by signing up for the program she was also giving herself “permission” to leave work on time at least three days a week. Other participants with husbands and children indicated that their training time, especially the Sunday swimming sessions, provided them with a reason to do something for themselves on the weekends. Training gave them a break from their familial obligations and allowed them some quiet time to themselves during what is normally a very hectic lifestyle. Carly reflected,

[Taking this time for myself is] just a sense of self you know it’s actually I think probably being a working parent it’s the one thing I do that I do for myself by myself. And whether I [train] by myself or workout with other people, [my family is] not with me, so [my husband] and the dogs and the kids aren’t coming with me. So it’s kinda my time to get away and do something for me you know because it’s easy to get caught up in, “Ah gotta do this work, gotta do this, gotta do this and I gotta do the food shopping and clean the house” you know and you can end up with a weekend that’s completely scheduled and you know 6 o’clock on Sunday and you’ve never done anything for yourself in there. And then you’re too tired you run out you gotta get the kids to bed and there goes another weekend. So, you know, I think I started doing the triathlons specifically signed up for the program to break some habits you know like, “Ok, I will get out of work at a reasonable time at least a couple days a week,” you know, “I will take some time for myself from a weekend just for myself.”

Obstacles to Getting Involved

Women who began Danskin training had challenges to confront before they could even sign up for their training programs. For example, more than a few

participants joined their training programs without knowing how to swim. Frances remembered,

I actually learned how to swim in Tough Cookies. [...] I'd always swam but you know I never knew how to do laps, I had no concept of being able to put my face in the water and breathe one every other or every third or fourth stroke.

Frida, a Tough Cookies coach, remembers teaching another non-swimmer who “literally couldn't put her face in the water. And I used to tell her to go home and blow bubbles in the bathtub.”

Other women simply needed someone to believe in them. Eve remembered one woman saying, “I told my husband I was going to [train for the Austin Danskin] and he laughed at me.” Mary's story was similar. She remembered that her Danskin training:

Went against my family's ideas, everyone was just shocked. My sister was a little bit...she's had a hard time with it at first she's like, “Uh, you're the smart one, I'm the athletic one, get off my turf!” She just, she didn't want to mind but it was just like, “But you're bad at that and I'm good at it so what are you doing?” You know?

Women like those mentioned above, without athletic or swimming experience, would often call ahead to the coaches before signing up for the program to see if it would be alright if they participated. Because Austin Danskin training programs, like the Danskin race itself, are geared towards beginners, coaches would encourage these women to join the program anyway. As a result, many women overcame incredible physical obstacles to completing a triathlon during their participation in a training group.

Still other participants used Danskin Austin training as a way to recover after a traumatic life event. Elizabeth, an Iron Chicks coach, remembered,

Many of the women in the group seem to have [joined the Iron Chicks training group], after they have a divorce or to commemorate cancer of course or just

other really big milestones in their lives. Like one lady who blew me away is because her husband was accused of molesting a child and she couldn't get out of bed she said for six months and finally she (sic) just dawned on her, "Hey, I'm gonna do that Danskin race, that sounds like fun." And so she got out of bed to do it and so every year she does it as a way to kind of I don't know make herself feel better to say, "Okay, I'm one more year past all this terrible stuff that happened."

Despite and in some cases because of pre-existing barriers, women did become involved in Austin Danskin training. Some participants indicated that knowing that other women were competing in the Danskin Austin inspired others to give it a try themselves. Lucille stated that she would not have signed up for her training program had it been co-ed:

I don't think I would have done the Danskin if it were coed. I think that you know when I was first introduced to the idea [of a triathlon] it sounded ridiculous and I think it would have kept sounding ridiculous if it weren't all women.

Still others were hesitant to become involved because they were overweight. While none of the participants interviewed for this study indicated weight as an obstacle to involvement, a few of the coaches made reference to women calling before registering to make sure it would be alright that they were overweight and out of shape. For instance, Eve remembered, "[Team Danskin trained] a lot of women that I would consider overweight, slightly overweight or definitely overweight, and because [Danskin training] seems so approachable and so do-able to them, they go ahead and sign up for it."

Participants also faced obstacles which were directly related to being women. Eve reflected on Danskin participation as a whole and stated,

I think [women's lack of athletic opportunities as children] prohibits a lot of women from getting involved in things like this, getting involved in athletics [because they think to themselves], "I've never done this before and I'm gonna look stupid, be embarrassed, feel flabby," and there's a whole series of obstacles that they create in their head about why they don't belong in that environment.

Other women experienced a lot of stress as they tried to maintain a successful career. Jane is a lawyer who felt a lot of pressure at work to perform well and stay late hours. She often had trouble leaving the office by 5 pm each day. As a result, she signed up for the training program just so that she would have "an excuse" to leave the office and a time to call her own apart from work and her husband. Jane felt that she needed to sign up for an actual training program in order to have a documented reason for leaving the office on time a few days a week and taking time for herself.

Carly also relied on scheduled Danskin training sessions to help her take time away from her husband, children, and job. Like many of the women interviewed, Carly described her husband as "super supportive." Nonetheless, her role as the primary caretaker became clear as she described her husband's reaction to her triathlon training"

[My husband's] super supportive, he's like "I've got the kids, I'll take care of it!" so having somebody to hand the kids off to a couple nights a week or on the weekends or whatever like our kids both play soccer so you know being responsible for getting them to their soccer games. And I meet them [at their soccer games] when I get done [with training] and that kind of stuff, but I think if you were trying to do it on your own or if you didn't have as supportive a spouse that might be more of a challenge.

What both Carly and Jane's stories illustrate is hesitancy about whether or not they deserve leisure. Jane and Carly used leisure as both an escape and as a way to take time for themselves and yet Carly remained acutely aware of her obligations as a mother. Indeed, even while recognizing that she had a supportive spouse, Carly still spoke about

her situation as though she was asking her husband to go above and beyond his duties and take over for her as the primary caretaker of their children. However, she did note that she was able to continue taking time for herself even after the program ended. She recalled,

[The program] forced me to break some habits [...] [and I was able to continue taking time for myself to train] on Saturdays, telling my husband: “Good luck, have a good morning, talk to you later.” I think that was the biggest challenge that the program impacted on me and the fact that I’ve been able to sort of semi-continue doing that on my own after that is good too.

In fact, the effects of the ethic of care were evident even during the actual interview process. During an interview with Carly in her home, for example, her husband interrupted twice to ask for clarification on what to do with the children. Carly, like many of the moms interviewed, had set aside a special time during which her husband would take care of the children while she answered my interview questions. To fill this time, again like many of the other moms I spoke with, she had provided activities such as grocery shopping (for which she provided a detailed list) and a special nap time (for which she directed who should take a nap and for how long). Nevertheless, she was still required to provide instruction and direction during her interview time. This would prove to be a common situation during interviews and provided an interesting glimpse into the everyday lives of Austin Danskin trainees and the ways in which their gender and family roles provided both the impetus for and obstacles to becoming involved in Austin Danskin training programs.

Community Building

Having a full and complete experience for many trainees required forming a community of other women within the training group. Frances reported, “I just kind of intuitively know that if I want to make the most of this experience I want to do it with a bunch of other people and have a full, complete experience.”

Participants indicated that as time went on the group began to come together and support and look after its members. This coalescence became very important to many participants. Indeed most trainees felt as though they were a part of this group atmosphere and talked a lot about how important it was to their experience. Eleanor remembered, “There were about twenty of us and it became a real tight knit group. It was sort of fun as we became really good friends and supportive of each other, and I think that was one of the neatest things [about my training program].

Others sensed a community forming around them but were less aggressive about directly participating in it, Frances noted,

I never placed a lot of value on having a support structure around me that it was valuable to see [the other participants forming a community] even though I had to rely on it a lot less just being part of it was in itself an experience.

During the training program, participants were highly supported both by each other and by the coaches. Program facilitators encouraged coaches to do a lot of what they called “hand-holding” and even sought to employ coaches who were particularly good at gently dealing with beginners. Eve stated,

We still look for people who are supportive and approachable and sympathetic to [the fact that many women are beginners] and just very, very encouraging and opening with their heart [sic] and with their attitude and there's a lot of hand-holding that goes on and a lot of you know, "You go girl!" or "You can do it!" or "Good job!"

Elizabeth said that she looked more closely at personality than coaching skills when choosing coaches for her Danskin program. She stated, "The skills they pick up enough of the skills in order to get through it but I think the information that those people impart is so much more valuable." Eve agreed,

I'd say to be a good Team Danskin coach you have to have a love of the Danskin race and just a real, be approachable, and a real understanding of what it's like for the women, especially the first-timers, to go through the training and go from Point A to Point B, Point B being the finish line.

Participant-to-participant support came in many forms as well, from cheering on fellow trainees to providing a safe place for "women's talk." Eleanor described her training group more as a social group:

We would talk about time constraints, specifically women that would work [sic] and children, school. We would speak about the feeling of self-worth also. So yes, women's issues were becoming, were part of the whole allure of it, we could talk about that.

Other participants sought to learn from those few trainees who had participated in a triathlon before. These experienced "mentors" provided advice and also clarified that what the beginners were feeling both physically and mentally during training was normal. Alice, an Iron Chicks mentor, recalled giving advice on nutrition to a new trainee. She remembered, "Something that always comes up with the people that are new to the program they're like 'Oh my gosh, I'm eating like a horse, I'm so hungry all the time!'"

Group support became so important to some participants that they felt that without it they could not have completed the training program or the Danskin race. These women stated that not only was it important to belong to a group of fellow participants who were going through the same physical and emotional feelings as they, but that the very structure of the training program made it possible for them to workout and train day after day, week after week. Some stated that just knowing their training partners would be at practice waiting for them gave them the extra boost they needed to show up at sessions after a long day of work. Others felt that having coaches push them and provide them with detailed workouts was essential. In the end, the structure and community aspects of their training programs were both motivating and necessary for many participants. Frances recalled,

You don't even question [whether or not you should train that day] because you know you have no excuses because everyone else is doing it and you are at least as capable as most of them and so you just do it and so I think also all those workouts in the rain with a coach telling you "If it ain't rainin' it ain't trainin'!" [Frida, the main Tough Cookies coach, would not cancel workouts for rain]. And you have all these women calling [Frida] up in the morning on Saturdays saying "It's pouring down rain." [And Frida would say] "And your question is? Did you forget? If it ain't rainin', it ain't trainin'!" And so you know you have all these women showing up in the pouring rain that you know for the most part are the type of people like they're not even getting out of bed [on a day like that] let alone getting on a bike.

Having a group to share this special time with also allowed women to form friendships and talk about their daily lives with people who had a different perspective. One participant recalled that she particularly valued being surrounded by women of different backgrounds and employments. The diversity and yet unity of the group was appealing to her.

Community Overcoming Diversity

The community that formed within the training programs provided women with a support group for taking on any challenges and barriers that they may have brought into the program or faced once they began the program. The all-women's atmosphere of the training program provided a space for women to talk about their lives, take time for personal development, and allowed them to build bonds with other women – an experience many participants found lacking in their everyday routine.

For example, Alice's story about her first swim illustrates the important role of the group in providing support to women with fears and barriers to overcome.

It took me thirty-eight minutes to finish that half- mile open water swim. But I spent the whole time completely tensed up and stressed out. I got out of the water and all the [other training group members] were standing on the shore screaming my name, cheering me in, and when I got out of the water and took a look at them I just burst into tears. It was just such an emotional thing for me. We went back—I went back the next year to that same place because I swore I'd be there to pull the last girl out of the water again. And the girl who came in just before me came too. So [she] and I pulled [Sue] out of the water last year. And we made a pact that we'd all three be back for 2005 to pull that last girl out of the water. So it's pretty cool to have been the one out there swimming and looking up at the shore going "I'll never ever get there" and to get closer and hear everybody screaming your name and just it's really incredible. So I want to be there for that last person again.

Other participants developed challenges during the program, for example at least two participants developed stress fractures in their feet while training for the running section of the race. The community they had developed as well as the support that this community provided allowed them to overcome these injuries and participate in the race. For example, Courtney broke her foot a month into the training session. Instead of

urging her to drop out, the coaches reformatted her workouts and then helped her to ease back into running just in time to complete the 5K required by the Danskin course.

Mary trained while she was six months pregnant. Again, instead of forbidding her to participate, her coaches worked with her doctor and modified the program so that she was able to complete the Danskin race. Her fellow participants were also very encouraging and supportive of her even though she often required modified workouts. Mary remembered very proudly that she did not walk during the running section of Danskin race that year, not once.

The community that women built during their training programs was also the root of one of the most lasting social effects of the program: seeing friendly faces at events and “on the trail.” As women discuss the lasting effects of their training groups, many of them found that one of the most gratifying outcomes of training was that now when they participate in athletic events or even take a jog around the local running trail, they often see someone they recognize. One participant recalled seeing another Iron Chick on the trail and hearing her yell “Go Iron Chick” as they passed each other. Eleanor summed up her feelings about her Austin Danskin training group by saying, “Women helping women, it’s just really special.”

Resistance

Danskin Austin training communities provided trainees with a forum for reinventing the female athlete, the female body, athletic competition and even the very definition of sport. Indeed, sport and the female body are two constructs often defined and judged with a male gaze, and yet within the context of these all-women’s training

programs, women themselves were taking back these constructs and defining them using different parameters. While none of the participants directly stated that this form of resistance was occurring within the context of their training programs, nevertheless this unintentional resistance of cultural and social norms surrounding women's bodies and competitive athletics resulted in some of the most powerful and striking outcomes of women's participation in Danskin Austin training programs.

The Female Athlete

Danskin Austin training programs provided participants with the opportunity to interact with women who they felt were inspiring both on and off the training course.

Participants often called these participants and coaches "athletes" and held them in the highest regard. Eleanor stated,

You had some incredibly fine athletes in the group. [Both coaches and participants]. It's amazing how some people are just natural athletes and some of the women that were there swimming they looked like dolphins. I mean they were just fantastic.

Other participants reflected on the coaches' athleticism and remember being inspired by their success. In this instance, Frances recalled her feelings about her coaches:

I know that there are other aspects of the [training program] that ... one of them is the women that are the coaches. Without fail you know they all started from scratch. Some of them only like two years prior to when they were coaching this program that had loved it so much and gone on to get coaching certificates or certifications in cycling and various things to be able to stay a part of it and I think they've all moved on to where they started with friends and they were all training for a half-Ironman and so you have the motivation of these wonderful examples and I think [Frida] did a great job of gathering a group of women as her coaches that were just role models from a Mom-perspective or just great people from a motivational perspective all very caring and understanding and all been

there done that been through what you're going through they were just all really great women to have around.

Indeed, as the training program progressed, the participants began to view *themselves* as athletes as opposed to just participants in a training program. They began to refer to themselves using the term "athlete" and they spoke with confidence about their abilities. Mary noted,

You know I sort of had this startled realization near the end [of the training program] when you know people that didn't really know me that well would say, "Oh, but you're athletic" and I was going, "Oh my gosh! Really? That's great! I'm athletic?!" It was that feeling of, I might be a person who could be somewhat athletic, it was really exciting!

Eve remembered a participant saying, "Well, I don't think of this as intermediate, I don't think of us as advanced or elite by any means, but I think we're *lifestylers* because we've embraced this as our new lifestyle."

In fact, as the training program progressed, many of these women remembered feeling not only athletic, but also increasingly self-assured and physically capable of completing tough workouts and performing well in the Danskin race. Mary recalled, "I was just so astounded and impressed that I could actually run I could actually ride, you know, I could swim this distance in a lake that was like, 'Wow, that's a long way out there!' you know?" Exposure to women they felt were "athletes" as well as the strength and confidence they gained through training allowed Austin Danskin trainees to begin to redefine their identities in ways they did not previously think possible.

Redefining Sport

Austin Danskin training programs also provided their members with the opportunity to redefine the idea of sport. Instead of perceiving sport as a structured activity that involved competition and required each person to fight for themselves, Austin Danskin trainees came to internalize the story that Danskin race organizers themselves were promoting: sport is supportive, collective and non-competitive. Eve asserted,

[Men] can be so competitive and not necessarily with each other but within themselves or they're just very performance-oriented and results-oriented and they want to always do bigger, better, faster, stronger [...] and I think that Danskin is so opposite of that. It's all about being the best person you can be and getting across the finish line and saying you've done it, saying you're a triathlete. And a lot of women don't care about bigger, better, faster or stronger, they're just happy to be out there.

Indeed, the non-competitive aspect of these women's version of sport seemed particularly important to many participants. The women told stories about groups of friends who had even stopped participating in Danskin together because one of them was too competitive. Mary remembered,

One of [my friends] just got very competitive about the whole thing about the training about Danskin about I don't know very much wanting to direct everybody [in our group of friends and training partners] and what they should be doing and how they should be training, what they should be eating...and my other girlfriend was just totally turned off by it and just decided, "You know what? I don't want to [train with this group anymore], it's competitive and I don't like to be a part of it."

Intense competition was discouraged among training participants as it greatly conflicted with their story about sport. Frances recalled,

So the fact that somebody I was training with got really competitive kind of bothered me. [Her competitiveness] wasn't very right, it wasn't a supportive

position it was a selfish position and that just didn't jive with [the training program].

Participants described the competition as “de-motivating” and said that the competitiveness took away from the Danskin race day even though it was indeed just that, a race.

The women in these training groups were also able to tell the story of sport and training in such a way that they reclaimed it from men and the idea of masculine competition. Not only did women denounce competition, they also enjoyed the absence of men at their training sessions as they viewed men as the ushers of competition. Many participants felt that men would negatively alter their experience and often equated them with what they viewed as the negative aspects of sport. Eleanor described this common feeling:

Well men tend to just bowl you over to get, especially the swimming. They don't care, they just want to win, they want to get out there. That's not the camaraderie as much as it was in Danskin – everybody helps each other – and as you're running around everybody's yelling to each other “You Go Girl!” “You can do it!” “You're doing great!” you know that kind of constant support.

Women who were competitive seemed to be shunned from the group. Alice acknowledged the presence of competitive trainees but said that she ignored them. She went on to explain,

There were some people who were really competitive but they weren't the people that I hung around with so if they couldn't slow down to my pace and just relax about it I didn't really spend time with those people [sic].

The definition of sport provided by Austin Danskin trainees emphasizes a non-competitive, supportive and collective experience. Essential to this definition is the formation of a community within the training group as well as the ability to openly

support and encourage others. Additionally, this story of sport prohibits what the group considered “masculine” aspects of sport: competition and individualism. As a result, men themselves were not welcome to participate in workouts.

The Story of Danskin

The story that the trainees tell about sport closely mirrors the story that they tell about the actual Austin Danskin race. As many coaches acknowledged during interviews, the Danskin race appears to have its own aura or momentum. Indeed, the race itself may be thought of as the culmination not only of physical training, but also of emotional and mental training. The Danskin takes on an almost spiritual quality for many women; and the atmosphere is much like that of a wedding in that months of preparation, both mental and physical, culminate in this one event. Furthermore, and again akin to a wedding, the actual Danskin race is almost a rite of passage. Women have spent months in training groups building community and redefining their bodies and sport itself, and now Danskin provides them with the opportunity to meet up with thousands of other women who have been doing the same. The Danskin race is, in effect, a celebration of womanhood and resistance, and of bodies and sport, all as defined by the women themselves.

As such, the story of Danskin is told publicly via its website which promotes the race as a friendly beginner’s competition and as a chance to come together in the celebration of womanhood. It is portrayed by Danskin’s public relations department as a race with a purpose (fighting breast cancer) and as a way to pull together a community of women from all walks of life. Images of women holding hands while running across

the finish line decorate the Austin Danskin's internet homepage and the website's Frequently Asked Questions page states that, "Past participants range in age from 14 to 87 and in size from Petite to Plus; more than half the women who participate in the Danskin Women's Triathlon Series every year are first-timers" (Frequently Asked Questions, 2005).

Participants in the Austin Danskin training groups were very receptive to this story about Danskin and sought to recreate it in their own training groups and race experiences. When participants were asked to describe their Danskin race day, for example, a vast majority of them described Danskin itself as *unique* or *different*. Participants placed great value on telling a story which reflected what they called a *sharing of the whole experience* or even a *bond* that they felt with others in the *Danskin community*. They remember the race itself as very *positive, fun, and non-competitive*. They describe the atmosphere of the race as *supportive* and *encouraging*, and many recall hearing cheers of "You go girlfriend!" and "Go girl!" throughout the race. They remember feeling *emotional* and during and immediately after the race. Indeed, many women describe *crying* at the finish line or watching other people cry as they finished.

Many participants also used the word *empowered* when describing their experience or the experiences of others. Eve stated, "If I had to sum it up in one word, even since 1997, the word would be empowerment." When asked for her definition of empowerment, Eve said

To me it's just like [women who have trained for and raced Danskin] get it, they realize where [they started] and [how far they have come] and what all they had to traverse through to get there and it just gives them so much power, the power of belief, the power of confidence in themselves. To me that's empowerment –

confidence and belief in yourself and knowing that you've conquered this big goal and been structured with it and followed a plan and stuck to it. That's cool [...] and that's what comes to my mind every time I think of Danskin or the finish line.

In fact, the finish line itself takes on a sort of persona in many women's Danskin stories. The finish line is the physical site of community building, support and emotional release. Some participants tell stories about women they know who wait by the finish line to watch others complete the race. One participant recalled a friend who "goes out every year to do Danskin, finishes, and stands by the finish line and cries watching all the women crying." Frida said she made a habit of watching women finish the Danskin race:

To watch them cross the finish line with a smile...and I always stay at the finish line until the last person crosses the finish line. And I look at their faces and I give them a hug. I would say two-thirds are crying.

Other women recall their own time at the finish line. Eve noted,

...then when I crossed the finish line it was like looking around the finish line and seeing all the people, smiles of joy and pride and empowerment and it was like you could just feel it in the air and these women were so proud of themselves and I just thought, my first thought was this is the second happiest day of my life.

Many participants were so impacted by their Danskin training and racing experience that they sought to become involved in Danskin or pass it on to their friends. Many participants told stories of bringing their women friends to Danskin to inspire them to want to complete the race as well.

One or two of the women interviewed for this study have since gone on to become "mentors" in their training program – women who have done a triathlon who are

allowed to participate in the training program again for free in exchange for sharing their triathlon training stories and wisdom with first-timers.

Other women have become coaches; in fact two out of the three coaches interviewed for this study did Danskin as their first triathlon. Still more women go on to volunteer at Danskin. They become Swim Angels or they man water stations or they just show up to cheer.

In these ways, the Danskin story is recreated and retold through women's stories about their own training and racing and through the stories they tell others as mentors, coaches and friends.

Redefining Bodies

Just as the trainee community and the story of Danskin allowed women to seek a new and collective definition of sport, it also allowed for the redefining of the female body. Participants often entered into the training group with negative or suboptimal feelings about their bodies. When they were asked to reflect on their feelings about their bodies before beginning training, many of them said things similar to Eleanor's reaction when she was asked how she felt about her body before beginning Danskin training. She recalled, "I wasn't feeling very good about my body, but not horrible, you know?"

Many participants even entered into training with the hope that perhaps, among other things, it would help them lose weight. None of the participants that I spoke with actually did lose weight during the course of the training program. Some may have lost weight in the subsequent months as they continued to train regularly, but the training program itself was not a site of weight loss. Indeed, several participants actually gained

weight over the course of the program – a result that they explained by muscle gain or eating more to compensate for intense physical activity. Interestingly, however, none of the women expressed dissatisfaction with their weight gain or lack of weight loss. To the contrary, many women indicated that they felt better about their bodies during and immediately after the training program than they had when they began. As such, it appears that a paradigm shift occurred for many women during the course of training. This shift may be best explained in the words of the participants themselves. One recalled,

Well I thought I would lose weight. I mean I really expected to. But by the time I did it I felt so good about being so strong and so fit and so able to do things that I couldn't do before that I was alright with that. I had hoped to lose weight but in the end I really didn't care that much.

Many participants would agree with this woman's sentiments. Many found that training made them feel better about their bodies because they experienced an increase in strength, ability or muscle mass. They felt accomplished and strong and so they did not mind what their bodies looked like or how much their bodies weighed because they were empowered by what their bodies could do. Within the Danskin training programs women were able to redefine the purpose and ideal look of the female body. They were able to escape a bit from the Madison Avenue standards of women's beauty and instead focus on the importance of their physical abilities.

Through experiencing this shift within a community of other women in similar situations, participants were able to see all shapes and sizes of women performing well during training. This exposure helped reinforce their changing story of women's bodies as it taught them that form and function may not be as closely linked as Western society

believes it to be. Instead, they saw all sorts of women who were both healthy and athletic. This made a great impact on the psyche of the trainees. Courtney stated,

You know I keep kind of going back to the all different shapes and sizes [of women's bodies that you see during Danskin training and racing], you know? It's real easy for me to get caught up in "Oh, look at all the little chicks!" and how fast they are and how great they are and all that stuff. It made me kind of realize that sometimes your strength and endurance is, I think sometimes being a bigger person, I don't know. Sometimes I feel like I can go further, you know, I'm stronger than somebody. And not necessarily better but stronger and you know I think it's I think different thing [sic] and kinda just not take it for granted, oh you know, you have to be little and tiny to pull this off. You have to be skinny and you have to look like an athlete because you don't. All sorts of people out there doing it.

Jane made a similar point:

When you go to Danskin you see every shape and size and realize what diversity there is in women's bodies and that's really neat. I mean you see it a little bit in your training group but when you get to the actual race and everyone's wearing their little tri-suits as opposed to the t-shirts and shorts, you really see the difference. But it's kind of almost wasted when it's just on women because of course women are going to be more accepting of all the different women's bodies but that's the one thing that maybe the co-ed races have an advantage over [all-women's races] because women aren't the only ones witnessing this.

Once participants began to redefine women's bodies within their training groups, a few of them expressed the desire to teach not only men but also their own children this new definition. Some of the participants expressed a desire to conquer, once and for all, their own body image issues so that they would be able to pass on the makings of a healthy body image to their daughters and even their sons.

Once their training programs ended, however, many women lost some of their positive feelings about their bodies and continued to struggle with body image related issues. Alice said,

I feel better about my body than I did [before training began]. I still feel like I have the same issues that I did back when I very first started. The part of my body I hate the most is my stomach and I don't think it's ever going to go away so I should really just adapt, but that's probably the part of my body that I'm most self-conscious about.

As a result, it appears that the women in this particular study did well at handling body image issues as long as they were surrounded by other group members and actively involved in the process of redefining the female body. Once the training ends, however, and the social world dissolves, former participants began to once again struggle with negative feelings and fears related to their bodies.

An Alternate Danskin Story

The stories and quotations found in the above five sections reveal what the Danskin training and racing experience was like for the vast majority of women interviewed for this study. Women relied very heavily on each other during training for a sense of a women's community, and this community in turn provided women with a venue for redefining sport and the female body. The culmination of this training was the Danskin race—an almost spiritual event which provided women with a public forum in which to meet others who had gone through similar training experiences and provided the opportunity for demonstrating new definitions of the female body and of competitive sport. However, one participant as well as some of the coaches interviewed for this study provided insight into an alternate view of Danskin, a view that may be linked to triathlon experience.

Danskin Caters Towards Beginners

The Danskin experience, including the experience women have in the training groups examined for this study, is mainly geared towards beginners who do not wish to become competitive triathletes. While there is an “Elite” racer category, and professionals do compete in the Austin Danskin race, the race is in no way geared towards these competitors nor does it glorify them. Danskin Austin remains geared towards beginners and specifically towards first-timers. As a result, women who have competed in triathlons before beginning a Danskin training group or competing in the Danskin training race may not enjoy their experience entirely. In fact, one particular participant who was an experienced triathlete when she signed up for her Danskin training program had a negative reaction to many of the aspects of the program that provoked particularly positive reactions from beginners. Jane, for example, stated,

I find the whole all-women thing kind of annoying. So just it got a little, maybe it was the size of it too but it definitely got a little annoying, all this “Hey, you go girl,” just I don’t know why, maybe it was because I’d done a couple of co-ed triathlons beforehand [...] and I found them just as fun just as supportive and so by the time I got to Danskin it was really crowded and we had to wait like three hours before our wave started and so I was just kind of in a bad mood and I was like “I’ve been waiting for three hours” and everything’s all super positive. I don’t know, it was a little frustrating.

Coaches agreed that they geared their Danskin training programs specifically towards women who had never done triathlons before, and in fact one coach appeared to encourage women to leave Danskin and Danskin training once they became more comfortable with triathlons. Frida said,

There’s some trainees that keep coming back, they’ve been training with me for like three years now and I’m like “You’ve heard this over and over again, move on!” you know? And I love having them there but I feel like you know they need

to move on [...] I'm not going to change my focus, I'm not going to stop focusing on the beginners because they're the ones that need the most help.

Outgrowing Danskin

As a result of the Danskin's focus on beginners, some women do appear to "outgrow it." One woman who began her triathlon career in a Danskin training program now says that she misses the community there and the women that she trained with, but she felt she needed to move on to a more advanced training program in order to prepare her for Nationals.

Eve stated that 50% of Austin Danskin participants are beginners each year. As such, she deduced, that 50% do not race the Danskin again. She conceded that some of them may just never do a triathlon again, but said that "Some of them I think are the more experienced ones who have kinda run their course with the race you know 'been there, done that.'"

While the Danskin training programs and races were positive experiences for 90% of the women interviewed for this study, it is nevertheless important to consider also the story of women for whom the race was not a positive experience. These are often the same women who do not wish to be interviewed about their experience and in fact may have removed themselves from listservs and contact sheets making it all but impossible to track them down. Therefore, while only one of the 11 participants interviewed for this study provided negative feedback, her story must be told as if it represents many more women who have been silent about their experience.

Conclusion

Although negative cases were uncovered during the course of this study, it remains that the majority of Austin Danskin trainees that I interviewed were positively affected by their experience. These positive affects may be directly linked to the training program's ability to foster community building as well as provide challenges and inspiration. The social world that participants constructed within the training groups also provided participants with the tools to positively redefine sport and their very bodies in a way that benefited them emotionally and psychologically. Telling and retelling the story of Danskin allowed women to pass on these benefits to the next generation of racers and trainees as well as to strengthen their feeling of being connected to a community of Danskin participants.

I really hope that the Danskin [...] sticks around and that I get a chance to drag my daughter out there and make her do it and get other people involved. You know, it's kinda hard, I have a hard time putting my hand on exactly what it is about doing the Danskin, it's just an experience that I think that more women should really really try to be a part of.

– Courtney

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

We can be both optimistic and pessimistic about the future. The concerted effort of feminists committed to empowering women and other disadvantaged groups is needed to work toward the social change that is desirable. We will need to use all the tools for social change to achieve more gains and reduce the gaps. The future for women and their leisure is waiting to be created by us.

- Henderson et al., 1996

The primary purpose of this study was to examine women's leisure within the context of all-women's Austin Danskin triathlon training programs in order to explore the concepts of leisure as resistance, leisure social worlds, and women's body image. A major conclusion of this study is that women utilized leisure to resist dominant social norms regarding women's bodies and sport. Regular participation in triathlon training programs facilitated the formation of new, collective definitions of sport and the female body. These definitions were conveyed during training sessions and were in harmony with the Danskin triathlon story. This chapter will flesh out these ideas as well as provide some suggestions for future research.

Discussion of Results

Body Image

Like the women studied by Frederickson and Roberts (1997), Austin Danskin trainees were subject to their own habitual body monitoring. They were very aware of their bodies and aware of how society expected their bodies to look. Over half of the

women felt that their bodies required improvement or indicated that they were not happy with their appearance. Other women indicated that they were happy, or at least content, with their bodies but they still mentioned weighing themselves and other body monitoring tactics that suggested they were nonetheless keeping watch over their bodies. Consistent with the work of Markula (1998), many women in this study equated thinness with health; therefore in wanting to look “healthy” they also wanted to appear thin. Indeed, the majority of women interviewed for this study spoke about some sort of body image problem, distress caused by the physical appearance of their bodies, or the urge to change the way their bodies looked physically. These sentiments are in line with much of the current body image research which suggests that poor body image is a continual and growing problem among Western women (Wolf, 2002). However, the women in this study were able to experience a lessening or even a temporary cessation of body image concerns during the course of their training programs.

Individual and Collective Empowerment

The current study answers the call of Henderson, Hodges, and Kivel (2002) as they asked for studies that will examine the processes leading to individual and collective empowerment. The data from this study suggested that Austin Danskin training programs lead to both collective and individual empowerment, especially as related to the female body and the notion of sport. Many participants not only felt better about their athletic ability over the course of the program, but many even used the word “empowering” to describe their race day experience. Women encouraged each other using terms such as “Go Girl,” and in general created a culture of empowerment.

Indeed, the fact that these training programs were for women only was important to many participants. Several trainees stated that they would not have signed up for training programs, or even for the Danskin race, had they been co-ed. They placed great value on the fact that their all-women's groups provided them with time to discuss women's issues, meet other women, or even experience what they called "female bonding." Participants were comfortable physically and mentally around their female counterparts but suggested that this same comfort would not occur if the groups were co-ed. This suggests that the same-sex component of these groups was very instrumental to feelings of community and empowerment; however no studies have yet shown this link.

Participant's feelings of elation and empowerment during training and on race day in many cases faded a bit once the program ended. Women indicated that their feelings about their bodies again began to slip, and they did not talk about their workouts or athletic involvement with quite as much confidence and excitement. However, this result is also in line with Bialeschki's (2004) findings that leisure may be a site of personal empowerment (as well as communal resistance) even though the empowerment or resistance may fail in the long run. Bialeschki stresses that this failure or fading does not mean that empowerment was not achieved. In other words, even if the effects of Danskin training are not long-term, this does not mean that Danskin training did not have an effect at all. This study illustrates the need for more research in order to determine the generalizability of this data as well as the actual facets of the program or race that lead to feelings of empowerment.

Constraints to Leisure

As Henderson et al (1996) suggest about women's leisure in general, many participants in this study struggled with constraints to their leisure. Several interviewees spoke about barriers to participation stemming from ethic of care concerns or the feeling that they did not deserve leisure. This finding is consistent with Henderson et al's (1996) conclusion that many women suffer from constraints to leisure stemming from gender role expectations and the feeling that they must be perfect mothers and wives as well as perfect professionals. Indeed, while many of the participants in this study expressed their belief that their spouses were supportive of them and their leisure pursuits, the very act of interviewing them revealed that they still struggled to balance leisure and work with their roles as primary caretakers.

Rewriting the Master Story

Consistent with previous studies of social worlds (Wolkomir, 2001) and narrating the self (Och and Capps, 1996), the social worlds studied here provided a context in which a group of individuals could interpret the world differently from mainstream society and in doing so tell an alternate reality or story that all group members accept as equally valid. In the case of Austin Danskin trainees, this alternate story revolved around the female body and sport. My results suggest Austin Danskin trainees actively reinterpreted society's norms not only as they relate to the female form but also as they relate to sport itself.

Participants in this study did not accept mainstream society's view that women's bodies should be thin, tan and muscular. Instead, like the gay Christian males in

Wolkomir's (2001) study, Austin Danskin trainees reinterpreted societal norms by telling their own collective story, a story that recognized that women of many body shapes and sizes are equally able to participate in athletics. Furthermore, Austin Danskin trainees celebrated women's bodies for what they could do and not how they looked. The story they told about women's bodies focused on ability, power and personal accomplishment. This relates directly to Frederickson and Robert's (1997) work which found that women may effectively fight objectification by being active and in control of their lives.

Additionally, the fact that women's feelings about their bodies became more positive during and directly after participation in their training groups confirms the work of Wiggins and Moode (2000) as well as that of Tantleff-Dunn and Agliata (2001) who found that athletic participation increases body esteem in women. However, the current study provides evidence of even deeper reasons for positive body feelings than simple athletic participation. As suggested by Ochs and Capps (1996), Austin Danskin trainees are actually creating group narratives about female bodies and these group narratives are becoming individual's master stories about their own bodies as well. As Mason-Schrock (1996) also found in their study of transsexuals' support groups, Danskin trainees formed a group identity and found support within that group – both factors which became important to combating societal pressures to conform to a particular body image or definition of sport. However, this study also found that once group support ended (i.e. after the Danskin triathlon when training programs ceased) some women again fell back on more negative feelings about their bodies. This suggests, as Mason-Schrock (1996)

found, that continued group support is necessary for maintaining an alternate master story.

Collective Identities Led to Leisure as Resistance

Henderson et al (2002) made a call for future research which would examine leisure as a site of social change. It appears that Austin Danskin training groups may be just such a site as they provided a forum not only for the communal telling of an alternate story but also, as suggested by Kivel and Kleiber (2000), a place to resist narrowly prescribed roles. In the case of Austin Danskin trainees, these roles involved not only the female form but sport itself. The women interviewed for this study also rejected mainstream society's view that sport should revolve around competition, individualism and merit. Instead, participants told a story that allowed sport to be collective, celebratory, and fun. Sport was about camaraderie, teamwork, and taking on personal challenges. For the most part, Austin Danskin trainees were unconcerned with their places or times at the Danskin race. Instead, they celebrated the abilities of all women. As such, the women in this study also used their training groups as sites of political expression and resistance to mainstream society's beliefs about women. For instance, the communal telling of a story about sport which allows it to be collective, supportive and fun directly contradicts what mainstream society often considers being sport (competitive, individualistic and performance-driven).

Additionally, the group's redefinition of the female body indicates a deviation from mainstream society's emphasis on bodies as ornaments in favor of bodies as instruments. Sue Shaw's (2001) study of leisure as resistance suggests that women may

use leisure activities to resist dominant ideologies. In the case of the current study, women were resisting the idea that their bodies should be beautiful but perhaps not strong and functional. The women training for the Austin Danskin triathlon wanted to be more than just pretty, they wanted their training programs to take them beyond bigger, better, faster or stronger. They were looking for a social and communal experience which would empower and enable them.

What Does This All Mean?

This study, exploratory as it was, suggests an interesting link between the formation of social worlds, leisure as resistance, and a women-only recreation environment. The data from this study show that social worlds did indeed form within triathlon training groups, and that these social worlds provided a forum for women to resist dominant societal ideologies regarding sport and the female form. Participants in this study also suggested that their training groups would have been altered, in many cases negatively, by the inclusion of men. It was specifically stated that men would encourage a competitive and individualistic version of sport, a version that directly conflicts with that developed by women during training. Therefore, it may be said that the fact that training groups were for women only provided a crucial link between the formation of social worlds and the resistance of societal norms.

It is important to note as well that participants in these training groups also experienced temporary increases in positive feelings about their bodies during and directly after their training programs. This result is in line with current literature

although the link between positive feelings about one's body and the development of social worlds has not been fully examined.

Contributions to Service Delivery

It is important for recreation programmers to understand the motivations and needs of women as they relate to familial obligations, gender constraints and body image concerns. Findings from this study may provide programmers with a better understanding of the important role of collective storytelling and community within small women's recreation groups. This knowledge will enable programmers to provide quality experiences for these women which may in turn help to alleviate body image concerns. Additionally, this study will place further emphasis on the continuing impact of gender roles on women's leisure, an issue that programmers should keep in mind when planning recreation opportunities for women.

This study also expands the body of literature within the field of recreation, parks and tourism. This work combined leisure as resistance, leisure social worlds, and body image in order to explain the experiences of a small group of triathlon trainees. The combination of these three concepts allows for the beginning of an understanding as to how they may be interrelated. Women formed social worlds within recreation training groups, these social worlds allowed them to redefine their bodies and sport itself in defiance of mainstream society's views, and the result was that women felt better about themselves, their sport, and their bodies.

The current study also suggests that there is room for the re-shaping of service delivery within the recreation and leisure field. The women in the study repeatedly stated that their workouts in groups were better than the gym and better than the treadmill. They also placed a great deal of emphasis on the non-competitive nature of their training. Therefore, in order to create a sustaining exercise habit, recreation providers may want to consider implementing aspects of the Danskin training programs. Specifically, emphasizing the group and de-emphasizing competition. The role of a culminating event (in this case the Danskin triathlon) should also be examined further. The role of an event to look forward to, work towards and train for should not be underestimated.

Suggestions for Further Research

The field of recreation, parks and tourism has not fully taken on the issue of adult body image and the potential positive impact that recreation programs may have on adult's feelings about their bodies. It is important that we begin to study this not only as a youth issue, or even as a women's issue, but as something that faces both sexes in all walks of life. What this and other studies show is that recreation has the potential to help people feel better about themselves, and this potential should be fully explored.

Future research is also needed to examine the link between leisure as resistance, social worlds, and same-sex groups. The link between these three areas as well as the potential of leisure to be political and social worlds to affect change should be examined within the scope of feminism and women's-only groups. Indeed, a very limited amount of literature exists which examines women's-only social worlds and recreation groups.

We do not understand the importance of women's friendship and kin groups from a leisure standpoint. Further study on this topic has the potential to reveal further positive outcomes from same-sex recreation participation within the context of social worlds and leisure as politics.

Indeed, many studies of leisure as resistance focus on the LGBT community. While this community is indeed an important area of study, it would be beneficial to broaden this study to include working mothers, young women, women of color, men, etc. The application of leisure as resistance may certainly be made within a wider context, and doing so would provide additional examples of how this phenomenon works within certain contexts.

Additionally, it should be determined whether or not training groups for what Sjostedt and Jevne (1993) call "weight dependent" sports are also able to foster similar sorts of social worlds as found in this study whose members are also able to resist dominant social norms. Indeed, we have not made a clear link between sport and creating positive body image – a link that would prove vital to the treatment of eating disorders and perhaps on the other side of the spectrum – obesity.

Finally, a future study of the differences between male and female training group participants would also be of value to determine what differences may exist in male and female leisure social worlds and the stories those social worlds tell. It would be valuable to determine the ways in which males use leisure as resistance. As societal pressures on males are increasingly recognized (Cronan and Witt, 2005), this link becomes increasingly important to examine.

Some possible hypotheses for future research include: Is the Danskin program special or do other programs exist which result in similar outcomes? Were these training groups special or do other training groups result in similar outcomes? What was the role of a culminating event in these women's experiences? What was the role of Danskin advertising in these women's feelings of community and empowerment? What other programs may produce similar outcomes both emotionally and socially? What is the role of gender in feelings of community, empowerment and social resistance?

Limitations of the Study

This study has its limitations, namely that the ability to generalize this study to overall women's leisure or even other triathlon training groups is questionable. As this study was exploratory in nature, the sample does not include a wide range of women from a wide range of backgrounds. While it is representative of the two training groups examined, this study is not representative of women's triathlon training groups as a whole.

This sample was also limited in that it did not include many women over the age of 35 and under the age of 25 nor did it provide a wide cross-section of racial, economic or sexual preference backgrounds. The bias towards 25-35 year old white married females with children may be in part explained by the choice of triathlon training groups. Additionally, this bias may be explained in part by the fact that the sport of triathlon tends to draw middle to upper class white participants. Nonetheless, a more varied sample would have produced a greater depth of data.

Additional limitations of this study were that it set out to examine body image as a main focus and ended up examining social worlds and community as its' main focus. Had the interviews been conducted with social worlds at the forefront instead of body image, they may have produced a greater depth of knowledge.

The selection of interview participants is also subject to critique. Only former participants who responded to their coaches' emails to the listserv were asked to participate. As such, women who had particularly negative experiences were difficult to track down as they were less likely to remain on a listserv or to answer requests for more information. Indeed, there may be more to the story of women who did not enjoy their Danskin experience. I was not able to gather very much data at all to explain under which conditions these drop-outs and negative experiences occur. Additionally, the fact that the sample was not random may also have inadvertently allowed for a sample of participants prone to sharing a certain viewpoint or experience.

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APPENDIX A
INFORMED CONSENT FORM

CONSENT FORM

Body Image, Community and Resistance within Women's Triathlon Training Groups

I understand that I have been asked to participate in a research study examining the potential psychological, emotional and body image-related benefits of participation in women-only triathlon training groups. I was selected to be a possible participant because I was recommended by a former coach or fellow participant or because I was identified as a program coach. A total of 20 people have been asked to participate in this study and they were selected from one of two triathlon training groups located either in Austin, Texas.

I understand that I will be interviewed for one to two hours and that my interview will be tape recorded. I will be offering my opinion and experiences. I may be contacted via email for one 30-45 minute follow up interview. I have no obligation to participate in this follow up interview. I may withdraw from the process at any time, if I so choose. My taped responses will remain confidential and only Megan Kelly Cronan and Dr. David Scott will have access to my taped interview. I understand that the tape of my interview will be destroyed after 3 years.

I understand that I am receiving no monetary compensation for my participation in this study. There are no risks to my person; emotional, physical or psychological. My decision of whether or not to participate in this study will not affect my current or future relations with Texas A&M University, the Danskin Triathlon series, or any triathlon training program. I am free to refuse to answer any of the questions that may make me uncomfortable. I can withdraw at any time without my relations with the university, job, benefits, etc., being affected.

I understand that this research study has been reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board- Human Subjects in Research, Texas A&M University. For research-related problems or questions regarding subjects' rights, I can contact the institutional Review Board through Dr. Michael W. Buckley, Director of Support Services, Office of Vice President for Research at (979) 845-8585 or via email at mwbuckley@tamu.edu.

I have read the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers to my satisfaction. I have been given a copy of this consent document for my records. By signing this document, I consent to participate in the study.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Signature of Investigator: _____ Date: _____

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