The academic and athletic challenges of college women's basketball

Kristi Zeller

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A thesis

entitled

The Academic and Athletic Challenges of College Women's Basketball

by

Kristi Zeller

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty as partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the Masters of Liberal Studies Degree

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The University of Toledo
May 2011
An Abstract of

Women’s College Basketball under the microscope

by

Kristi Zeller

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Masters of Liberal Studies Degree

The University of Toledo

May 2011

This thesis explores the academic and athletic challenges faced by female college basketball players. There are far fewer studies of female college basketball players than male basketball players, reflecting wider power structures associated with gender and sport. However, women’s college basketball deserves examination in its own right because there are different graduation rates, ethnic make-ups, patterns of injury and career aspirations for female college basketball players compared to males. Using interviews with players, coaches, student advisors, as well as press articles about the team, this thesis explores some of the unique experiences of members of one University’s women’s basketball team. The thesis adopts a holistic approach – examining both the academic and athletic experiences of female basketball players. Their experiences with the media, and the gendered nature of basketball reporting, are also examined. The thesis reviews every article published about the University of Toledo’s Women’s Basketball Team in the 2009-2010 season, and highlights its gendered dynamics. For instance, there is a pattern of constantly emphasizing that it is “women’s” basketball, and also attributing wins to the skill errors of opponents, rather than the good play of the team.
This thesis is dedicated to my loving parents. Thank you for all of your support, dedication, and patience.
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I would like to thank my parents for their support through all my years in school. I have been blessed with loving parents who would do anything in the world for me. Without their drive for me to excel and all their time spent in helping me, this thesis would not have been possible. I love you both very much. You are everything to me.

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Chapter 1:

Introduction

This thesis explores the academic and athletic challenges faced by one particular group of athletes: female college basketball players. While there are a number of studies which explore the particular dynamics of male college basketball players (Botzung, Rubin, Miles, Cabeza, & LaBar, 2010; Brooks & McKail, 2008; C Keith Harrison, Comeaux, & Plecha, 2006; May, 2008; Phillips & Jubenville, 2009), there are far fewer studies of female college basketball players. This neglect within the literature may reflect wider power structures associated with gender and sport – but it needs to be explored in the case of college basketball in particular because there are different graduation rates, ethnic make-ups and career aspirations for females compared to males (Newell, 2007). Basketball, for both men and women, is an important cultural component of the American athletic scene – but in different ways. The NBA has a far different profile than the WNBA; the implications of Title IX are particularly significant for women’s basketball; and the road to professional basketball is not emphasized nearly as much for poor, minority women as it is for poor, minority men within the broader cultural schema (Bruce, 1998; McCabe, 2008; Muller, 2007).
Themes of muscularity, competitiveness and athleticism challenge the wider cultural positioning of women as passive and meek. The stereotypical image of women as “glamorous, graceful and nonsweaty and definitely not roughed up by contact with other women” (Duncan & Hasbrook, 2002, p. 84) contrasts with the physical contact and aggressiveness of competitive women’s basketball. Likewise, for some women, basketball provides an opportunity to redefine femininity and to create an empowering space against wider social inequalities such as poverty, racism and sexism (Yep, 2010). Media coverage of women’s sports is itself deeply problematic: “When women are represented in the media, these images often trivialize, objectify and/or marginalize women in sport and physical activity (Cooky, 2006, p. 98)”. This thesis will examine the media coverage of The University of Toledo Women’s Basketball Team in one regional newspaper, The Toledo Blade, as an example of the gendered social context in which female basketball players strive for success.

Women’s basketball is different from men’s basketball. For instance, there are several differences in men’s and women’s college basketball rules (Roane et al., 2004). One example is that women’s basketball has a total shot clock time of 30 seconds whereas men have 35 seconds to score. In men’s basketball, not only is there a 35 second shot clock, but they also have a 10 second backcourt violation rule. This means that the team has 10 seconds from the time they throw the ball in bounds to when they cross half court. If they do not cross half court by the 10 seconds then it is considered a violation and they loose the ball. This means that a men’s team must run an offense at a faster pace. Also, the rules for traveling, fouls and illegal screens are more strictly enforced in women’s rather than men’s basketball. In men’s college basketball the 3pt line is 20 feet,
9 inches and in women’s college basketball the 3pt line is 19 feet, 9 inches. These rule
differences affect the style of play: in women’s basketball, shooting form, smart play,
passing and skill/technique are more emphasized. On the other hand, dunking in the low
post, “flashy” play, a fast paced game with less traveling and foul calls are features of
men’s play (Roane et al., 2004). Given the extent of such gender differences, it is
important to specifically examine the experiences of women’s college basketball players
as a unique group. Their social, demographic and educational experiences may be
significantly different to male basketball players – and this study aims to explore how the
totality of their experiences, as female student-athletes, affect their motivation to succeed
athletically and academically.

Student-athletes are an incredibly vulnerable population. (The term “student-
athlete”, as opposed to “student athlete”, is used in this thesis because this is the preferred
terminology for the National Collegiate Athletic Association – NCAA). Many dream of
a professional career, but statistically very, very few will make it. Even if they have the
talent, and the luck (which the vast majority do not have), they are always only one major
injury away from the end of these career aspirations. Additionally, the focus of many
student-athletes on sports is potentially a double-edged sword: while part of their success
comes from their athletic drive, ambition and identity, an excessive emphasis on sport –
without sufficient emphasis on academics – can also place their careers in jeopardy.
They need to have excellent time-management skills, and must multi-task well so that
they can achieve success both athletically and academically. They must maintain a high
enough Grade Point Average to continue their studies – especially those with an athletic
scholarship, because it too could be taken away with academic failure. Student-athletes
also deal with various layers of bureaucracy associated with athletic departments that are also unique (for instance, a change of major or transferring from one degree to another can jeopardize their athletic eligibility). As a result, student-athletes need to be focused on the pursuit of both athletic and academic excellence – and yet they may face specific demands on their time and energy associated with travel, practice and other activities which other students do not experience.

Some student-athletes enter higher education simply as a vehicle to continue their playing careers – for these athletes in particular, maintaining a high level of academic motivation can be a challenge (Schulz, 2007). They must juggle competing priorities and manage their time effectively in order to maintain a high GPA and continue playing. They may also face stereotypes and prejudices from other students who disparage their intellectual abilities. While striving to reach their academic goals, many student-athletes experience a range of prejudices from other students – suggesting that they are less academically capable, less intellectually capable, and are marked easier than other students (Keith Harrison et al., 2009; Wininger & White, 2008). Student-athletes whose academic and athletic identities are closely linked may find such prejudices particularly confronting (C. K. Harrison et al., 2009). It may be hard, in the face of all these pressures, for student-athletes to maintain their motivation throughout their academic careers at University. This article therefore aims to identify barriers and supports which may affect the motivation of student-athletes, as a vulnerable student population. It addresses this issue from the perspectives of athletes, coaches and athletic advisors.
Gender differences pervade every aspect of college basketball – from the different admission prices for women’s and men’s college basketball games to the unequal finances of the competitions and even to the reduced likelihood of a woman being hired as a coach (Dufur, 2008; Kian, Vincent, & Mondello, 2008; Pappano & Tracy, 2009). Another gender difference lies in the area of injuries: female basketball players are far more likely than their male counterparts to experience anterior cruciate ligament injuries, Grade I ankle sprains and knee injuries. Concussions and lower leg stress fractures are two other significant injuries which commonly occur in women’s basketball (Agel et al., 2007; Harmer, 2005; Hosea, Carey, & Harrer, 2000; Jordan, Hagen, West, & Wright, 2008). Additionally, female basketball players tend to experience more severe injuries than males, for many types of injuries (Hosea et al., 2000). There are even differences in terms of the demographic make-up of fans of female and male college basketball, including the attitudes of fans towards gender (McCabe, 2008). These differences may be reinforced through the differential coverage of men’s and women’s college basketball in the media (Blinde, Greendorfer, & Shanker, 1991; Bruce, 1998; Diehl, 2009; Kian et al., 2008; Messner, Duncan, & Wachs, 1996). It has also been suggested that men’s and women’s basketball players are different athletically (Roane, Kelley, Trosclair, & Hauer, 2004), racially (Banet-Weiser, 1999; Yetman & Berghorn, 1993), academically (Yetman & Berghorn, 1993), and psychologically (Green & Holeman, 2004). Academically, female college basketball players tend to have a higher GPA and significantly higher graduation rates than their male counterparts (Hosick, 2009).
Previous studies

Women’s professional basketball and the WNBA have been discussed in the literature extensively (Banet-Weiser, 1999; Edelman & Harrison, 2008; Gómez, Lorenzo, Ortega, Sampaio, & Ibáñez, 2009; Hanis-Martin, 2006; McCabe, 2008; Muller, 2007). Women’s collegiate basketball has also been studied (Mak, Lee, & Donahue, 2008). This literature review will highlight some of the common themes and differences between the coverage of women’s professional and college basketball. Previous studies on the gendering of women’s basketball have emphasized a number of themes:

- Men’s sport is given more coverage than women’s sport (Messner, Duncan, & Wachs, 1996);
- Male athletes are often considered to be the norm – and therefore not explicitly identified as ‘male’ whereas women’s teams and female athletes are usually specifically designated as female (Messner et al., 1996, p. 432);
- Men’s and women’s success or failure in basketball is explained differently: “Men appeared to succeed through a combination of talent, instinct, intelligence, size, strength, quickness, hard work, and risk taking. Women also apparently succeeded through talent, enterprise, hard work and intelligence. But commonly cited with these attributes were emotion, luck, togetherness, and family” (Messner et al., 1996, pp. 433-434).
- One study found that women’s sports have usually been either marginalized, or treated with equality (but the author highlighted the fact that an emphasis on equality would include an open discussion, in the news, of the barriers which female athletes experience in resources and press coverage) (Pirinen, 1997);
A 2008 study examined the effects spectators’ attitudes towards the WNBA and how or why audiences feel a certain way about women’s sports (McCabe, 2008). The research was based on a “multifactorial gender identity theory”, which suggests that gender stems from multiple social contexts. There were a number of hypothesis tested:

- **Hypothesis 1** “Biological sex will contribute to the prediction of affect toward women’s professional basketball”;

- **Hypothesis 2a** “Spectators high in instrumental traits will have a more positive affect towards women’s professional basketball than individuals with low levels of instrumental traits”;

- **Hypothesis 2b** “Expressive traits will not significantly contribute to spectators’ affect towards women’s professional basketball”;

- **Hypothesis 3** “Gender-role attitudes will contribute to the prediction of spectators’ affect towards women’s professional basketball. Specifically, spectators with more egalitarian gender-role attitudes will have a more positive affect toward women’s professional basketball than spectators with more traditional gender-role attitudes”;

Only hypothesis 3 was supported by the results of the research. In other words, people who had egalitarian attitudes towards gender roles are more likely to support women’s professional basketball. Another interesting finding was feelings towards the WNBA were not determined by the individual's sex, even though the WNBA’s fan base and marketing has been targeted towards women, children and families. The findings in this study show that it might be important for the WNBA to market not only to women, children and families, but also to men.
In “The Gender of Audience Building: Televised Coverage of Women’s and Men’s NCAA Basketball”, the authors analyzed television coverage, including factors such as news, broadcasting/ commentary, and technological aspects of both Women’s and Men’s NCAA basketball (Messner et al., 1996). It suggests that women’s sports are often ignored, marginalized, or trivialized. Sports media has been slow to build up audiences and frame women’s sports as something to be excited about. Rather, it traditionally links sports with men and masculinity. Messner et al focus on gender bias in both the selection of athletic events and in the manner in which they are reported. Their research showed that in 1993, the NCAA Men’s regular season games outnumbered the NCAA Women’s regular season games by 285 games. Most of the nightly coverage of NCAA sports was dedicated to men’s athletics, and the news stories that were of women’s sports were more not likely to be followed up by interviews.

Commentators often emphasized the gender of female athletes, but not males. For example, “Tonight’s game is the Women’s NCAA semi final between Albany and St. Francis”. They also repeatedly mentioned any mistakes that the female athletes made during a game and claimed the mistakes were because of “…nervousness, lack of confidence, lack of being comfortable, lack of aggression, and lack of stamina”. On the other hand, men’s errors were usually ignored, minimized or attributed to the superiority of the opposition. Messner et al believe that such verbal commentary implicitly suggests that women are inferior, denying their strength, status, and ability.

“Audience Frustration and Pleasure” (Bruce, 1998) involved in-depth interviews with basketball fans about televised coverage of women’s basketball. The lack of coverage of women’s basketball, compared to men’s basketball, implicitly suggests that men’s sports
are more important. Even though women’s sports are being televised more every year, female athletes are still being stereotyped and overall, women’s sports are devalued in the media. Bruce suggested that female athletes are often ignored, trivialized, stereotyped, devalued and treated with ambivalence. Television commentary often positions women as weak, less aggressive, and not as skillful as men. Additionally, when women’s basketball was telecast, there were fewer camera angles and less close-ups/replays than in men’s basketball and the commentators often did not know a lot of information on the female athletes. This study is useful, as far as this thesis is concerned, because it highlights the need to examine in detail the types of technology used, the gendered messages in commentary, and the extent of detail provided about women’s games within reportage by The Toledo Blade.

Another study focused on media coverage of men’s and women’s college basketball as it pertains to the Internet website ESPN.com (Maxwell, 2009). The author found many occasions where hegemonic masculinity was challenged within basketball reporting. An effect of hegemonic masculinity is that basketball has been considered a man’s game, which involves physical rough play and that these characteristics are not typically associated with women. When looking at the media, women’s basketball has been the “other”, and commentary has often trivialized female athletes by commenting more on them as individuals and less on their physical play or skills. In contrast to the cultural practice and assumptions of hegemonic masculinity, this research shows that there have been vast improvements in women’s college basketball reporting, although there is still room for improvement.

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In “Gender Warriors in Sport: Women and the media”, the authors used a case study from the Amateur Athletic Foundation (AAF) in order to analyze the ways in which sport has been deemed by our society as male dominated as shown through media (including magazines, newspapers, televised media, and radio coverage). The conventional impression of sport is, men are superior, posses mental and physical toughness, are competitive, take initiative, have strength, power, and aggression. Women on the other hand are perceived as, inferior, weak, incompetent, cooperate, are passive, timid, and vulnerable. With the authors findings the masculine hegemony is reinforced through the media portrayal of women. In the author’s research of magazines, they focused on Sports Illustrated for Kids (SIK) and Sports Illustrated for Women (SIW). There was a decrease in the amount of photographs that featured women, and they were consistently outnumbered by the photos of men. Even though there is a SIW, female athletes continued to be underrepresented and were portrayed in feminine sports.

The authors then studied how women were portrayed in the newspaper. Looking at the New York Times and USA Today, they found that women were underreported especially in proportion to other televised studies. The argument was that people are not as interested in women’s sports as they are in men’s. The newspapers claim that they are simply giving their audiences what they want. Even in the section for NCAA news, which is supposed to include both men’s and women’s sports, was still dominated by men’s sports. Not to mention that very few of the articles are written by women. This is suggesting that women do not belong in the sports arena, even when it comes to reporting. As stated by Duncan, “The dearth coverage marginalized women’s
participation in sports rendering men’s sports authentic sports, and women’s, a pale imitation.”

The technical quality that was studied by the authors showed that women’s sports had a much lower production quality than men’s. Women’s coverage was less likely to feature slow-motion replays, interesting camera angles, frequent shot clock appearances, relevant statistics, clever computer graphics, and sophisticated framing. In 1999 the main difference that was found was in the postgame shows. Women’s coverage of postgame was significantly shorter and contained less sophisticated analysis.

When looking at how the media builds their audiences, it was found that women were more likely to be featured as a sex object or the butt of a joke. Producers would sometimes argue that they tried broadcasting women’s games but, because of the lack of viewer interest they could no longer do so. In 2000 the AAF reported on how Sports Center broadcasted women’s sports. It was found that only 2% of their broadcasts were of women’s sports. Instead of reporting on women’s sports, sexual differences were more likely used to describe female athletes. For example, sexual humor/sexual objectification of female athletes in the media received higher ratings than if the media just reported on the actual events of the game. This made it seem as though women’s sports is laughable and that they belong in the bedroom and not in sports. Sexuality is another area where women are more commonly reported on. The eroticization of the female body is used to explain why the women’s team is popular. Because of the conservative patriarchal view of our society the use of hyperfemininity is used in the media to rule out homosexuality. Lesbianism is seen as a “threat” to the straight male and female. So, the media uses
heterosexuality as a way to hide lesbianism. The media will over report on female athletes’ pregnancies and marriages instead of how they played in their sport.

Maxwell recognizes that previous studies indicate women’s basketball has been the “other” and commentary has often trivialized female athletes by commenting more on them as individuals and less on their physical play or skills. In the case of EPSN.com, the research clearly recognizes that there are gendered inequalities in reporting. For instance, it is more common to visit a women’s basketball home page and find a repeat article or re-published information as compared to men’s basketball. Also, women’s headline/featured article photographs were less likely to be updated as compared to men’s basketball photographs. This sends a message that women’s basketball is subordinate to men’s and updating men’s photographs and articles are more important. Also, when looking at how women’s basketball coaches are represented in the media, it was found that female coach’s salaries were hardly ever published and the men’s coaches dominate the articles featured. This is interesting considering men’s basketball is 100% male coaches whereas in women’s basketball it is not 100% female coaches. Another form of gendered inequality is that ESPN.com reported injuries in men’s basketball much more than women’s basketball. Nevertheless, the dissertation did find certain challenges to hegemonic masculinity and male dominance in the reporting by ESPN.com. For instance, in photographs, female athletes were more likely to be shown in their uniform and on the court in action. The photographs portrayed a reversal of gender roles; men’s basketball players were shown during the emotional times (celebrating, being disappointed), whereas the women basketball players were shown in action being aggressive.
While the findings may or may not be replicated in the reporting of the University of Toledo’s Women’s Basketball team by *The Toledo Blade*, this dissertation to some degree, provides a model for assessing the media coverage of women’s basketball which will be applied in the current study. It suggests that research should examine the gendering of various aspects of reporting:

- Photographs (and particularly the visual representation of emotions rather than action from the game, including celebrations and disappointments);
- Whether the focus of reporting is on the coach or players;
- How people are portrayed (e.g. in/out of uniform, on/off court, in action or posed);
- Whether photographs are new or reproduced;
- The extent to which injuries and the health of players are discussed;
- The extent to which syndicated lists are reported;
- Connections between college and professional basketball; and
- The level of non-game reporting.

All of these areas will be considered in evaluating the gendering of reporting on The University of Toledo’s Women’s Basketball team – with the exception of photographs, which are beyond the scope of the study.
Chapter 2

Methodology

This chapter will outline the methodology used in this study. The thesis relies on multi-method approach – a detailed content analysis of press coverage, interviews with the coaches and athletic advisors at The University of Toledo, an internet-survey of past and present players in the University of Toledo’s Women’s Basketball Team, and an interview with the reporter who was responsible for most of The Toledo Blade’s stories on the University of Toledo’s Women’s Basketball Team in the 2009-2010 season.

Time Frame

This thesis examines one season only: the 2009-2010 Women’s Basketball Season. During this season, there were 34 games. The survey was conducted in the off-season, after the 2009-2010 season.

Participants

Responses to the questions in this study were provided by 19 players from The University of Toledo’s Women’s Basketball team. It included players from the previous four years as well as those on the current roster. The choice to recruit former players was
made for a number of reasons: in particular, it was somewhat difficult to recruit participants and some former players indicated a desire to participate in the study. The inclusion of former players also expanded the scope of the research so that it included players at various stages of their academic careers – some who have graduated, some who are seniors and juniors, and some who are just embarking on their studies. Comments were solicited at various times during the academic year, but particularly in the off-season when athletes had less demands on their time. Seven athletic advisors and four coaches were included in a pilot study to help identify salient issues for student-athletes. This was a form of triangulation: by seeking the perspectives of players and academic advisors, it was hoped that some additional areas of success – or issues of concern – might be identified.

**Online method**

After approval by The University of Toledo Department for Human Research Protections Social, Behavioral & Educational Institutional Review Board, links to the survey were sent to coaches and individual players who were known to the researchers. The survey was conducted via the internet-based research tool, Survey Monkey, which is increasingly popular at The University of Toledo because internet communication is a common daily form of communication for most students at the University. Additionally, Survey Monkey protects the confidentiality of respondents by giving them internet numbers rather than recording their names, and (Sherry, Thomas, & Chui, 2009).

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Sampling Method

Examining the athletic and academic motivations of female college basketball players (and their impressions of press coverage) might seem, from an outsider’s perspective, to be fairly straightforward. It might seem easy to simply ask those players what motivates them, and what hinders their motivation, and to simply record those responses. But this is only one part of the wider phenomenon. As much as student-athletes may be willing to respond to such questions (and there may be some reticence to do that), they are not the only ones who can make such a decision. Their coaches are gatekeepers, who have the power to permit or block such participation. Additionally, there are established power structures in college athletic programs (such as the athletic advisors who specialize in dealing with academic problems for student-athletes) who may not be happy about an intrusion into their ‘territory’. This study adopted a unique response to this challenge – it not only has sought out the perspectives of the student-athletes, but it has also asked coaches and athletic advisors for their support in conducting the research. This multi-dimensional approach may have improved participation rates, as well as a far more comprehensive picture of the overall problem.

Coaches were initially asked for their support in conducting the survey, and they were also asked to pass an invitation to participate on to their players. Although the rosters of college teams are public information, the email addresses of players are highly confidential and coaches operate as gatekeepers with the right to veto unwanted demands on the time of players. Academic advisors were contacted separately, since their contact details are public information and they are listed in the campus directories of all colleges and universities. The methodology included both purposive and snowball sampling –
players from various rosters were specifically asked to participate, and they were also asked to forward the email invitations to other players who they thought might be willing to fill out the survey.

**Quantitative Instruments**

There are a number of established mechanisms for studying the athletic and academic motivations of student-athletes. One tool for measuring these variables is the Student-athletes’ Motivation toward Sports and Academics Questionnaire (SAMSAQ), which has been previously identified as a reliable tool for studying college athletes (Alexander, 2008; Gaston-Gayles, 2004, 2005). The present study also incorporated the Athletic Identity Measurement Scale (AIMS) which has also been widely used in assessing the importance of athletics in a person’s overall identity (Brewer, Cornelius, Stephan, & Van Raalte, 2010; Maxwell & Visek, 2009; Mignano, Brewer, Winter, & Van Raalte, 2006; Sepulvelda, 2008; Steinfeldt, Reed, & Clint Steinfeldt, 2010; Visek, Hurst, Maxwell, & Watson, 2008). The SAMSAQ and AIMS surveys are presented in detail in Appendix One of this thesis. The SAMSAQ and AIMS measure slightly different aspects of this phenomenon: while AIMS focuses exclusively on sports identities, SAMSAQ includes both athletic and academic issues. SAMSAQ specifically focuses on the levels of motivation of athletes about both their studies and their sports, while AIMS measures the importance an athlete places on sport within their overall identity.

There are some limitations with SAMSAQ and AIMS: for instance, neither specifically explores gender issues. If a comparative study was done between men and women, such gender differences might be implicit, but they are not explored sufficiently.
In order to overcome this limitation, additional qualitative information was solicited about the viewpoints of female basketball players about the impact of gender on their roles as student-athletes. Another limitation of SAMSAQ and AIMS is that neither specifically asks about the importance of personal qualities (such as leadership or mental toughness) upon which student-athletes might rely on in both sports and academics. These qualities may be the cornerstone of a student-athlete’s success, and may be encouraged by coaches, academic support staff and faculty, so they deserve some attention. Respondents were therefore asked a series of qualitative questions in order to explore these issues.

While responses to SAMSAQ and AIMS were totaled and represented as percentages of overall responses, advanced qualitative analysis (such as Chi-Square analysis) was not conducted because of the small sample size. Qualitative responses were coded into themes in order to identity common experiences or ideas. The coded data was then analyzed in detail in order to explore the nuances of each topic.

**Qualitative interviews**

Female basketball players were also asked qualitative questions about the challenges they have faced at University (personally, academically and athletically) and were also asked what could be done by their University (including their coach, team, academic advisor, counselor, and professors) to assist them with these challenges. They were additionally asked about the differences between the experiences of female and male college basketball players. The purpose of this qualitative component of the
research was to identify additional barriers and supports which student-athletes believe might assist them to achieve greater success, athletically or academically.

**Interview with The Toledo Blade Reporter**

Another qualitative interview was conducted with Zach Silka, the chief reporter of *The Toledo Blade*, who was asked a range of questions about gender and press coverage regarding *The Toledo Blade* and The University of Toledo’s Women’s Basketball Team. He was asked about word counts, the interests of editors, changes in reporting of Women’s Basketball over time, changes associated with online reporting, and the degree to which players and coaches are quoted. The interview with Silka was used as a background to the research, rather than being incorporated into the analysis, because the interview did not last more than 25 minutes, and the reporter was not aware of any gender differences… essentially, making little contribution to the analysis provided here.

**Press coverage methodology**

Another major component of this thesis is a detailed examination of press coverage in *The Toledo Blade* regarding the 2009-2010 season for the University of Toledo Women’s Basketball Team. There were 46 articles published during the entire 2009-2010 season, each of which is individually analyzed in this thesis.
Chapter 3

Motivations of Student-Athletes

Student-athletes in this survey clearly indicated that they were strongly invested in both academic and athletic success. The vast majority indicated that they prioritized their studies, recognized that the main reason they are in college is to earn a degree, and worked hard to achieve academic success. This prioritization of academic work occurred despite many of the respondents indicating that they were deeply invested in their identities as athletes and suggesting that sport was one of the most important things in their lives. Additionally, many of the student-athletes were confident about their ability to be a star performer and desired to play their sport professionally. Even though most of the athletes were confident that they would get a good Grade Point Average (GPA), they often reflected on the difficulties juggling sport and academic demands – particularly when they were travelling, but also adjusting to their different schedules when the season ends.

The results of the SAMSAQ survey were very interesting. In terms of their athletic goals, most of the respondents indicated that they wanted to earn a high Grade Point Average (GPA). 11 respondents (61.1%) strongly agreed and 6 (33.3%) agreed that earning a high GPA (3.0 or above) was an important personal goal for them. Only
one respondent (5.6%) strongly disagreed with this sentiment. Most indicated that most of their course content was interesting, with 6 (35.3%) strongly agreeing and another 6 (35.3%) agreeing with this sentiment, and 4 (23.5%) indicating that they were neutral and only 1 (5.9%) disagreeing. The vast majority also indicated that they were motivated to put in extra time to succeed academically – 8 (44.4%) indicated that they strongly agreed, and another 8 (44.4%) agreed with the statement “I am willing to put in the time to earn excellent grades in my courses”, while 2 respondents (11.1%) gave neutral responses. Likewise, most disagreed with any suggestion that “It is not worth the effort to earn excellent grades in my courses”. 9 respondents (50%) strongly disagreed with this statement, and another 7 (38.9%) disagreed. However, 1 respondent strongly agreed and another agreed with this suggestion that extra effort in classes was not worthwhile. Though these numbers are small, this is still somewhat of a concern given that (officially at least) the primary responsibility of a student-athlete is to succeed academically.

Virtually all of the respondents indicated “It is important for me to learn what is taught in my courses”, with 9 (50%) strongly agreeing and 7 (38.9%) agreeing with this statement and 2 (11.1%) being neutral. Likewise, in response to the statement “I will be able to use what is taught in my courses in different aspects of my life outside of school”, 7 (38.9%) strongly agreed and another 7 (38.9%) agreed with this statement, while 2 (11.1%) were neutral. Most believed that they would be academically successful. 14 (77.8%) said they strongly agreed and 4 (22.2%) agreed with the statement “I am confident that I can achieve a high grade point average this year (3.0 or above)”. All were confident of earning a college degree – 16 (88.9%) strongly agreed with this statement and 2 (11.1%) agreed with this statement. Most were confident in their abilities to earn

1 Only 17 respondents answered this question.
high grades, but a small percentage indicated a concern with their ability to earn high grades in some classes. In terms of doubting their ability to succeed in some classes, 3 (16.7%) indicated that they strongly agreed this was a concern, 4 (22.2%) were neutral, 9 (50%) disagreed and 2 respondents (11.1%) strongly disagreed with this suggestion.

When answering the AIMS, respondents generally indicated that they identified as athletes. 13 (72.2%) strongly agreed that “I consider myself an athlete”, 3 (16.7%) agreed, and 1 (5.6%) “slightly agreed” with this statement. Interestingly, one respondent (5.6%) “strongly disagreed” with this statement. (This respondent’s answers will be examined in more detail later because they consistently suggested a different view from other respondents). Most respondents also indicated that “I have many goals related to sport”: 9 (50%) strongly agreed with this statement, 7 (38.9%) agreed and 1 (5.6%) slightly agreed. Again, the individual who had strongly disagreed with the first statement also “strongly disagreed” with this statement. Not surprisingly, given the time commitments associated with being a student-athlete, the vast majority of respondents also indicated that “Most of my friends are athletes”. 9 (50%) strongly agreed, 6 (33.3%) agreed, and 2 (11.2%) slightly agreed with this statement. Again, the one individual who gave dissonant responses to the previous question indicated that she “strongly disagreed” with this statement. There was a far more diverse range of replies to the statement “Other people see me mainly as an athlete” than to the previous questions. 1 person (5.6%) disagreed with this statement, 2 (11.1%) slightly disagreed, 2 (11.1%) neither agreed nor disagreed, 1 (5.6%) slightly agreed, 6 (33.3%) agreed, and 6 (33.3%) strongly agreed.

When asked if “Sport is the most important part of my life” there were a variety of responses. 5 (27.8%) strongly agreed, 3 (16.7%) agreed, 2 (11.1%) slightly agreed, 2
(11.1%) responded that they neither agreed nor disagreed, and 4 (22.2%) slightly disagreed. Contrary to the previous responses, 1 (5.6%) respondent disagreed and another respondent (5.6%) strongly disagreed and did not think that sport was the most important part of their lives. Surprisingly with the statement “Sport is the only important thing in my life”, 7 (38.0%) strongly disagreed and 6 (33.3%) disagreed with this statement, while 3 (16.7%) slightly agreed, 1 (5.6%) agreed, and 1 (5.6%) strongly agreed. In response to the statement, “I spend more time thinking about sport than anything else” there were a variety of responses. 1 (5.6%) strongly disagreed, 5 (27.8%) disagreed, 2 (11.1%) slightly disagreed, and 2 (11.1%) neither agreed nor disagreed with this statement. 3 (16.7%) slightly agreed, 2 (11.1%) agreed, and 3 (16.7%) strongly agreed.

Emotionally, sport looms large in the lives of student-athletes. When asked if “I feel bad about myself when I do poorly in sport”, 5 (29.4%) strongly agreed, 8 (47.1%), 3 (17.6%) agreed, and only the one respondent who consistently gave minority answers disagreed with this statement. However in response to the statement “I need to participate in sport to feel good about myself”, there were a broad range of responses: 2 (11.1%) strongly agreed, 1 (5.6%) agreed, 4 (22.2%) slightly agreed, 4 (22.2%) neither agreed nor disagreed, 3 (16.7%) slightly agreed, 3 (16.7%) agreed, and the respondent who always answered differently from the rest of the group strongly disagreed. Likewise, in responding to the statement “I would be very depressed if I were injured and could not compete in sport”, the emotional significance of basketball in the lives of these women was again evident. 7 (38.9%) strongly agreed with this statement, 4 (22.2%) agreed, 2 (11.1%) slightly agreed and 1 (5.6%) neither agreed nor disagreed. However, 3
respondents (16.7%) disagreed with this statement, and the one respondent who seemed to have a very different perspective on sport to the others again strongly disagreed.

Overall, the responses to AIMS suggested that sport is an important identity for most of these student-athletes. While they may not all consider it the most important element of their lives, or spend most of their time thinking about it, there is no denying that it has incredible significance for their self-image and self-esteem. The social circles of most student-athletes are other student-athletes and many fear injuries (and their potential impact on the person’s moods and self-esteem). However, there was one individual who consistently replied that she did not prioritize her athletic identity. For this individual, neither her self-image nor her self-esteem was deeply connected to sport and her social circle did not revolve around student-athletes. Her replies are an important reminder that student-athletes are homogenous; they have different needs, expectations and life experiences. Such minority perspectives also need to be considered in responding to the academic and athletic motivations of student-athletes.

The results given by participants in this study to SAMSAQ and AIMS are somewhat consistent with previous studies in confirming the centrality of both sport and academics to their identities and motivations. However, the qualitative interviews conducted with student-athletes highlighted some issues which had previously been ignored in the literature – specifically, the impact of gender on their experiences and the belief of student-athletes that the personal traits developed in sport (such as mental toughness) transfer seamlessly onto the academic realm.
Qualitative responses

One of the most interesting components of the responses by female basketball players (which were not captured in their SAMSAQ or AIMS responses) was their awareness of the importance of gender issues. In particular, respondents indicated that they were aware of the differences between the social reception of men’s and women’s basketball. For instance, one commented “Men’s basketball receives more media coverage and hype and always seem to have ‘nicer things’. I understand their revenue is bigger but maybe women’s revenue would be the same if they received more attention as well… Universally I would say that men's basketball players are more idolized than women's basketball players.” This respondent was also aware of the gendered differences in the academic performance (and academic reputations) of male and female student-athletes. “Women’s basketball players are usually very respected and well liked because many students can easily relate to the work they put in and receive little attention. I notice that students and professors find it easier to approach us then the men’s team at times”. However, she also believed that the wider cultural emphasis on winning in sports can over-ride gender differences – when a men’s team is in a losing streak, for instance, and a women’s team is winning, she suggested that the women’s team will receive more attention and support from both the public and the University. “I believe that the University and the public favor the winning team, which is probably typical of most communities. I can say this because I've seen the treatment form both sides of the fence. My freshman year produced little success and I felt little attention from UT and the public but as my success has increased so has the attention I receive from the community.”
Another respondent made similar comments: “There is a definite difference in the fan base between women's basketball and men's basketball. Especially in smaller conferences… Media coverage is limited in the women's game to the few shining teams where as the men's game does highlight the successful teams but also the smaller conference teams as well”. A third respondent also highlighted the importance of these gender differences: “Some take men's more serious than women's but that is starting to change also. Within the University I feel that women and men basketball players are treated the same, but with some people in the public they can put one before the other.”

This awareness of gender differences demonstrates the need for a detailed study of the athletic and academic motivations and experiences of female basketball players. For instance, while the (male-dominated) literature on basketball often highlights the fact that career aspirations of a professional basketball career are often flawed (May, 2008), there are few studies on the long-term athletic and academic perspectives and motivations of female basketball players. Yet the respondents in this study indicated that academic success (rather than athletic success) was their primary responsibility and goal as a student-athlete. One respondent said that her advice to other female basketball players is to “Remember that you are STUDENT first and then an athlete, because in the end your degree is what you have to fall back on because basketball isn’t always going to be there. So make sure you choose a career path that you can see yourself being successful at and love doing.” Another suggested that student-athletes should “Always make sure you’re academically in good shape because academics are more important.” A third respondent said “I spend the majority of my time on the important aspects, athletics and academics, that's what I'm in school for and I'm getting my degree.”
One major difference between male and female basketball players which has been highlighted in the medical literature, but not incorporated into studies of motivation, is the higher rate of injury among females. Participants in this study strongly emphasized the impact of such injuries on their athletic and academic motivation. One respondent indicated that her main personal challenge as a student-athlete had been “Becoming injured and having to work yourself to get back to where you once were prior to the injury.” Another commented that her greatest problem has been “Personally I have faced a lot of injuries” and a third respondent emphasized that “I faced injuries throughout my career that held me back from putting in the time that I felt I needed to, in order to take my game to the next level.”

The responses to the qualitative component of this survey suggest that they may be more likely to prioritize academic issues than their male counterparts – and they may even highlight the transferability of their athletic skills to non-sporting domains. For instance, even when asked specifically “What are your strengths and weaknesses athletically?”, only one respondent limited her response to technical skills related to basketball. This respondent indicated that her skills are “My quickness, being able to make quick decisions, good court vision, my defense”. Every other respondent spoke about personal qualities that could equally be applied outside the sports arena (though many did mention technical skills). Reponses particularly emphasized mental toughness, leadership skills and competitiveness. These personal qualities, arguably, are not only athletic qualities – they easily flow into other areas of life as well.

Specifically, even though they were unprompted to do so, the respondents included the following comments about transferable personal qualities when discussing
their athletic strengths: “My toughness”, “Leadership, discipline, communication”, “endurance”, “I am a confident and loud person. I will be positive with everyone and try to bring out the best in people. I have a strong work ethic and try to be the best I can all the time”, “Heart, and having the drive to win”, “Mentally tough and work ethic”, “I have a good ability to lead”, “I am competitive and I am mentally tough”, “Able to take in constructive criticism, coachable, strong work ethic, responsible”, “Quick learner”, “Hard worker, competitive, dedicated, leadership”, “Self determination, will, confidence”, “I love to be a leader”, “Dedication, hard work, energy” and “work ethic”.

Academically, many student-athletes emphasized their motivation to succeed and to work hard. Some of their responses to the question “What are your strengths academically?” included “My willingness to work hard in the classroom to get what I need to done”, “I am attentive, I want to be there to learn, and I don't skip classes”, “I am competitive and I want to succeed in the classroom. My parents are very proud of me when I do well in school and I do not want to let them down”, “Strengths are wanting to do good (sic), completing my class and homework)” and “My willingness to learn”. A commitment to hard work, punctuality, teamwork and persistence (which may overlap with the life lessons from basketball) was also common. For instance, responses included “I am very good at making sure things get done and done how and when they are supposed to be done”, “My strengths would be completing my assignments, showing up to class on time, and willingness to help others”, and “Completing tasks on time, doing my best, studying”. Organizational skills were also emphasized by some respondents: “Time-management, prioritizing, organization, efficient learning skills, self-motivation”, “Smart, organization” and “good listener, organized” were other comments.
Student-athletes also discussed the impact of things that happen in the team (for instance, playing time or conflicts between players) on their academic performance. There were a range of responses to this question, but seven out of fifteen student-athletes (46.6%) indicated that they would not let anything in the sporting arena influence their academic studies. Comments from these respondents included “Those type of things never affect me in the class room...what happens athletically only affects that part of my life”, “This does not really influence me academically, although I am thinking about it I am still able to focus in my classes and fully apply myself to my academics”, “Academically nothing interferes with my schooling”, and “Academically its your responsibility to get the job done in the classroom, you cant let no one come in between your studies”. Some student-athletes indicated that such issues can have positive effects on their academic work: “it just pushes me to be better at whatever I am doing (academically)” and “I tend to concentrate more on another aspect of my life when one part isn't going well”. Some respondents had a pragmatic attitude towards athletic problems, for instance commenting that “I’m influenced by winning games whether i play 1 minute or 35. Yes there will be conflicts but you have to work hard to get to where you want to be both athletically and academically” and “I have learned to take what I was given and make the best out of every situation”.

On the other hand, four of the fifteen respondents (26.6%) indicated that problems within the team, or even having reduced playing time, negatively affects their classroom performance. Their comments included that such athletic problems are “A big part of my life so therefore it effects every other aspect of my life negatively”, “Athletically things like that could cause me to not play as well and academically cause me to not do as well

2 Three respondents did not answer this question.
in my classes”, “My sport/team is my top priority so when I have a lot going on athletically, I have less time for academics and will often study less and sometimes get lower exam grades than I normally would”, and “If there is an issue on the team I do spend a lot of time thinking about it so it can distract me from my athletics and academics. If issue needs addressed then I may have to spend time outside of practice to handle it instead of studying”.

Conclusion

This study has shown that there is a need for further research into the gender differences in the experiences and motivations of student-athletes. Student-athletes in this study were aware of the importance of both academic and athletic success, but the higher graduation rates of female basketball players (and their responses to this survey) might indicate that female basketball players place a stronger emphasis on academic success than their male counterparts. The comments from student-athletes in this study also highlight the transferability of the skills they learn in the athletic realm (such as prioritizing, hard work, and persistence) to the classroom. Additionally, female basketball players were strongly aware of the gender differences between themselves and their male counterparts. The significance of such gender differences in the motivations of student-athletes has not previously been explored through the standard methodological tools such as SAMSAQ and AIMS. They were aware of the different social reception of male and female college basketball.

Additionally, the female basketball players in this study often emphasized the impact of sporting injuries on their overall levels of motivation. It is well known that balancing the identities of student and athlete can be difficult, and that dealing with
setbacks such as injuries can be very challenging. This is an area which had been under-explored in previous studies, but is an important gender difference given the higher rates of knee, ligament and serious ankle sprains in female basketball players. Additional supports in dealing with serious injuries may therefore be necessary for female basketball players, which may be different from male players. Such supports could draw on the personal strengths that the respondents to this survey identified – strengths such as their work ethic, toughness and endurance. Additionally, advice for players who are dealing with injury could connect to the broader finding of this study that their main reason for being in college is to earn a degree and that they would be able to use the mental skills they learn from basketball in order to create a better life in the future.
Chapter 4

Press Coverage

This chapter reviews all the press coverage received by the University of Toledo’s Women’s Basketball Team during the 2009-2010 season in *The Toledo Blade*. It not only summarizes every article, but it also identifies gendered themes that underpin much of the reporting. The author of most of these stories (Zach Silka) indicated in a personal interview that he was not aware of any particular gendered dynamics in the reporting (except for the fact that there were more quotes from female players since they are “more approachable” and “easier to talk to” than the UT Men’s Basketball Team). However, the review of such stories in this chapter will identify some important (and some subtle) ways in which the reporting was gendered. The next section of the thesis will specifically explore each report about the UT Women’s Basketball team for the entire season, highlighting the ways in which these themes are (or are not) present in this reporting.

**Stories from *The Toledo Blade***

In “UT, BG women MAC favorites”, published on 29 October, 2009, the focus of the article was on the UT and BG Women’s Basketball Team’s being picked as the ones to beat (Silka, 2009h). Immediately, the gendering of the teams is evident – it is in the
title of the story. While the head coach of UT, Tricia Cullop, is quoted as discussing themes not traditionally associated with the reporting of women’s basketball (for instance, she emphasizes the need for “hard work” and the need to “fight hard”), the journalist responsible for the story instead positions the game as involving “a little more friendliness” between coaches. This may be an unconscious gendering of the sport: reducing a fierce athletic competition between two teams into a personal rivalry marked by “friendliness” somewhat dilutes the sense of women’s basketball as a passionate, dangerous, elite competition. The report does not examine the size, strength, aggression, or quickness of the rosters themselves; instead, it diminishes the game to a gentle competition between coaching friends.

The article indicates that the head coach of UT, Tricia Cullop, and the head coach of BG, Curt Miller have a friendship that dates back several years. But Cullop did not speak of a friendship – that was inserted by the journalist – instead, she spoke about “rivalry”. Likewise, Curt Miller states “It’s always been a great rivalry, not only for the fans but also for the conference”. This rivalry draws fantastic crowds and in turn helps to promote women’s basketball in the MAC. Bowling Green has won the past 5 MAC Championships with a last year’s record of 29-5 overall. UT had a last year’s record of 18-13 overall and looks to improve on the upcoming season. Tricia Cullop states that she sees the ranking, “…as a compliment for what we did last season and for the talent that we return”. Both UT and BG had two players representing their team in the preseason All-MAC team which include, BG’s Lauren Prochaska and Tracy Pontius, UT’s Tanika Mays and Naama Shafir.
In “UT women set to play Ashland in exhibition”, published on 5 November, 2009, the early focus of the article is on freshmen the personal connection between Yolanda Richardson and Lisa Johnson (Silka, 2009g). Their personal connection from playing in the local high school competition in 2005-2006 underpins the story. Yolanda is a local from Toledo who has added depth to the talented UT roster. Former high school teammate Lisa Johnson, who will be a senior this year, has had a lot of experience playing against Yolanda. This is another interesting gender dynamic: the literature review in Chapter Two suggests that a sense of togetherness is far more likely to be reported among women than men in sports reports.

On the other hand, quotes from the players themselves simply focused on the contribution of each player to the team and its structures. Lisa Johnson stated that the incoming freshmen will, “…give us a deeper bench….That’s huge for us because we have an up-tempo style of offense…” Likewise, Tricia Cullop stated “Part of an exhibition game is teaching our freshmen little nuances that are particular to our team and about the game that are going to be important for them to learn. And even just getting past the nerves…” In the exhibition coach Cullop will experiment with different rotations and combinations for who will be playing in the game at the same time. This will prepare the team for their next opponent, Northwestern. Not only will Richardson have an impact but so will the other freshmen, Riley McCormick and Andola Dortch who will return from an ACL injury. The one-sentence description of Dortch’s ability to return from her injury is the first mention of injuries for the season. This is noteworthy given the high rates of injuries that female basketball players experience (as outlined in Chapter One).
In “Group effort helps UT women beat Ashland”, published on 6 November, 2009, the focus of the article was on the level of depth that was shown by the UT Women’s Basketball Team (Silka, 2009a). The Rockets beat Ashland 88-64, with Naama Shafir leading them with 17 points. The article indicates that Coach Cullop was able to experiment with different combinations not only with players, but also with offense and defenses. As stated by senior Tanika Mays, “I think we did good for an exhibition game, but we still have things we need to work on… It wasn’t perfect”. The freshmen all contributed to the win with Yolanda Richardson leading 8 points and seven rebounds, Riley McCormick and Lecretia Smith both had 4 points. Richardson stated that the game “…knocked all the nerves away…at first I was a little nervous, but now I feel like I can go out there and it’ll be just another game…” This win was a good boost for UT but now they have a week to prepare for their next opponent, Northwestern. Interestingly, Chapter Two suggested that an unconscious gendering of reporting often results on an over-emphasis on the skill errors of opponents as the reason for teams winning (whereas the skills of the victorious team are emphasized in men’s reporting). In this case, the report states “The Rockets had 17 steals in the first half, and forced 26 Ashland turnovers in the contest, while turning the ball over 20 times themselves”.

In “Rockets women fall in season opener: Night still special for Shafir as parents travel from Israel to watch” published on 14 November, 2009, the focus of the article was on Naama Shafir and her experience from being away from home (Silka, 2009c). Again, the focus of the article – albeit unconsciously – was on the domestic (family) connections of players. There is one unusual context which does deserve mention: one of the players, Naama Shafir, had made the difficult decision to move away from her home in Israel to
come and play for The University of Toledo Women’s Basketball Team. This was
difficult for her because she had to leave her family, which includes her parents and eight
siblings, and they would not easily be able to see her play. But the loss experienced by
the team is relegated to a secondary space in the article, behind her family ties. The report
indicates that even though UT lost the game against Northwestern, the night was still
special for Shafir because her parents attended the game. The article suggests that it
would have been great for Naama’s parents, Ytzik and Shlomit Shafir, to see UT win but
it was still a great experience for both of them. Ytzik and Shlomit Shafir presented each
player with a keychain with a picture of Hoshaya on one side and a Hebrew prayer on the
other side for good luck. They were so excited to see their daughter play. As her father
stated, “She’s always done very well in basketball. After her first year of playing, she
played with the boys because she was too competitive for the girls”. Her decision to play
at Toledo was not very popular among coaches in Israel but she is happy with her
decision. Although the loss was difficult coach Cullop stated that, “This was a great
measuring stick. It’s a great teaching tool heading into [tomorrow] against Cleveland
State”.

In “It was Mays’ day at UT as she gets 1,000\textsuperscript{th} point”, published on 16 November,
2009, the focus of the article was the individual accomplishment of Tanika Mays as she
scored her 1,000\textsuperscript{th} career point in the win over Cleveland State (Silka, 2010h). Tanika
Mays was the 21\textsuperscript{st} UT player to achieve this accomplishment. Tricia Cullop was very
happy to see Mays reach this milestone and labeled her as “…one of the all-time greats”. Mays ended up scoring her 1,000\textsuperscript{th} point by knocking down a free throw with 4:53
remaining in the game. Afterwards she commented on her milestone and said that she
was “…really oblivious to it…I didn’t even know until [Jessica Williams] came up to me at the free throw line and said, ‘Congratulations!’”. Not only was this game special because UT won, and because Tanika Mays scored her 1000<sup>th</sup> point, but the report also re-emphasizes the domestic connections of Naama Shafir (her parents were able to see her play). The article therefore suggests it was a wonderful night for UT players and their families. It was not an easy win, however. The first half of the game was a tough battle, but UT came out with a lot of passion and energy to pull away in the second half to get the victory.

In “Richardson sparks Rockets”, published on 22 November, 2009, the focus of the article was on Freshmen Yolanda Richardson and her contributions to the UT Women’s Basketball victory over Saint Peter’s (Wagner, 2009). Richardson, a graduate from Toledo’s Start High School ended the game with 14 points, 9 rebounds, and 5 blocks. She played a huge role in the win over Saint Peter’s and it was just as she dreamed the night before. As she stated, “My goal was just to help the team out any way I could”. This is exactly what she did and Tricia Cullop could not have been more proud of the way her Freshmen Center stepped up. As coach Cullop stated, “Yolanda has the opportunity to be one of the best post players in the conference before she graduates”. Even though UT won 68-50, UT struggled offensively at the beginning of the game. The article suggested that Yolanda Richardson was the spark that enabled UT to hit the lead. It also stated that by adapting to Saint Peter’s style of play, coach Cullop switched to play a zone defense, stopping their opponents. Again, the family of Naama Shafir was mentioned, and even their flight times back to Israel are provided.
In “Miners strike gold with 3s to beat UT”, published on 26 November, 2009, the focus of the article was the University of Texas El Paso’s (UTEP) 79-65 victory over UT (Staff The Toledo Blade, 2009b). One of the highlights of the game which was discussed in the article was that their 3 point shooting percentage was a mesmerizing 43.8%. UTEP also tied their school record with 14 3-point field goals in one game. Naama Shafir lead the Rockets with 14 points and 6 assists, but the 3 pointers hit by UTEP sealed the win for them. The article concluded by stating that UT’s next game was against Yale in the Holiday Inn & Suites Express Albuquerque Midtown Thanksgiving Tournament. Interestingly, the article was not written by local Toledo Blade staff (since the game was in Texas) and is the first one in the entire season to include the word “Women” in the headline.

In “Toledo women bring home tourney trophy from N.M.”, published on 30 November, 2009, the focus of the article was on the UT Women’s Basketball Team winning the Holiday Inn & Suites Express Midtown Thanksgiving Tournament (Staff The Toledo Blade, 2009d). Again, this article was not written by the regular Toledo Blade reporters, and contained far less of the gendered language which they usually adopt. The report simply focused on the achievement of the team. By winning the game against New Mexico, 62-56, UT claimed its fourth tournament victory in school history. As Tricia Cullop stated, “This is a tremendous win for our program against a very talented New Mexico team…I’m just so very proud of my team’s effort”. UT played with a lot of focus and put forth their best effort. Jessica Williams led the Rockets with 14 points, winning the tournaments Most Valuable Player (MVP). Along with Jessica Williams, Tanika Mays had 10 points and 10 rebounds, Naama Shafir had 13 points and
5 assists, and Melissa Goodall had 10 points and 2 steals. With UT’s win this was the Lobos only fourth loss over the last two years. UT’s next game on December 9th at home against Dayton.

In “Memorable title for Rockets: UT women experience highs and lows during N.M. trip”, published on 1 December, 2009, the focus of the article was on the UT Women’s Basketball ability to overcome obstacles and win the N. M. Tournament (Silka, 2009b). The first game of the trip was against UTEP, where Tricia Cullop admitted to being angrier than she had ever been in her career. The lack of effort and poor demeanor of the team, combined with mistakes, led coach Cullop to take a day off of practice and examine the film of the games with the whole team. As Cullop stated, “It’s not about wins and losses. It’s about not giving what I feel like is our best effort, and I’m not a big fan of pouting and laziness. And when I see those two things, it infuriates me”. Interestingly, the emphasis of the report is on the (feminized) emotions of the team. It uses phrases such as the coach being “upset” and the players “pouting”. Additionally, the report focuses on things which are seemingly un-related to basketball, such as the team going to the movies. The report indicates that while they were in New Mexico, the team visited the Sandia Peak Tramway, ate Thanksgiving dinner together, and went to see The Blind Side. Such a reference would be almost unheard of in a report about men’s basketball. Again, it is placed in the context of female domesticity: the players are assumed to be longing for their family at home. The players and the coach are even quoted about their “tram ride”, their visit to the movies, and their Thanksgiving dinner. These activities gave UT a chance to regroup and as coach Cullop stated, “That was
probably the best thing we did the whole trip was get a chance to get refocused on what was important”.

The article also indicated that after the initial disappointing loss, there needed to be a huge change and shift of energy within the team. It indicated that UT had a dramatic turnaround and came out in the next two games, looking like a championship team. It also suggested that UT used this trip as a way to strengthen and build team unity. The real change came from Jessica Williams who did not start in either of the Tournament games but brought the spark the Rockets needed. She won the tournament’s MVP honor and had a combined point value of 25 points over the two games.

In “Rockets women prepare to take on Dayton”, published on 9 December, 2009, the focus of the article is on UT Women’s Basketball’s next tough opponent, Dayton, which was ranked No. 20 (Silka, 2009e). It had been six years since UT has beaten an opponent ranked in the Top 25. Dayton had already knocked off two ranked opponents, Michigan State (no. 10) and Purdue (no. 23). This article quotes Coach Cullop extensively – her words take up eleven sentences. She does not use gendered language, so the tone of the article is different from the other reports. For instance, Coach Cullop stated, “… It’s an exciting game for our fans and a great measuring stick for us”. Even though this game will be a test for UT, they have proven that they can play with tough opponents such as New Mexico, and Dayton can only make them better. All week UT has been preparing for Dayton, and has been adding things to their game plan. Cullop stated, “We were constantly preparing for our next opponent….and put a few new wrinkles in”.

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In “Rockets women ground No. 20 Dayton”, published on 10 December, 2009, the focus of the article is on the great team victory of UT beating ranked Dayton after being down 19 points at halftime (Silka, 2009d). This win is one of the greatest comebacks for UT since 2001, when they defeated Kent State in the MAC tournament final. Courtney Ingersoll stated, “That’s probably one of the best basketball experiences I’ve had”. Being down 19 points at the half was not a source of pride for UT. The article emphasized that coach Cullop had a decision to make: What did she say to her team? Instead of yelling at them and putting them down, she decided to say, “…either step up to the plate or wave the white flag”. She then walked out and let the team talk and figure out what they needed to do. It paid off because in the second half the whole team stepped up. Naama Shafir led the comeback scoring 10 of her 15 points in the second half. Allie Clifton also scored 15 points and Tanika Mays scored 12 points and lead the team with 6 rebounds. Sealing the deal was Naama’s free throws where she was a perfect 8 for 8. Again, the coach was quoted in 11 sentences, and the players were quoted in 4 sentences. Since they do not use gendered language, in general, there were few examples in this report. (Although the coach did say that the players “could have chosen to sulk and to pout” - which arguably conjures up feminine images).

In “Shafir can be unpredictable, but dynamic”, published on 10 December, 2009, the focus of the article was on the individual contributions of Naama Shafir and how important she is to the UT Women’s Basketball teams success (Hackenberg, 2009). This was the first time a journalist from The Toledo Blade other than Zach Silka had reported on the games. The article mainly focused on the playing abilities (and inconsistent form) of Naama Shafir. It indicated that there are times when Shafir can be out of control and
when her defense is a step slow, but then there are times where she can take over a game and make sure UT does not lose. She was unstoppable in the win over Dayton. However the article also said that even with all of her success and talent, Naama can get really down on herself. She has traveled all around the world to play basketball and has left her home town to play at UT, but she still needs a pick up every once and awhile.

Heading to the bench down 14 points with 3 fouls, Naama was extremely frustrated and her body language reflected that. Coach Cullop said to her, “Your demeanor has to change if we’re going to win….I had to remind her how important she is to this team and how much I believe in her”. This speech must have worked because when Naama got back in the game she made great passes to her teammates and drove to get to the free throw line, changing the pace of the game. As Naama stated, “I know what I can do and I know what I can give to my team…I just had to stay focused and do those things”. Despite this seemingly gender-neutral reporting, Hackenberg gendered Shafir in one place, stating “She can be fragile” – a term usually reserved for women.

In “Rockets women struggle, but win: UT tops IPFW to win fourth in a row”, published on 13 December, 2009, the focus of the article was on UT’s struggle to win over Indiana Purdue Fort Wayne (IPFW) (Silka, 2009f). The article was by Zach Skila, the regular The Toledo Blade reporter. As suggested in the literature review in Chapter Two, one of the emphases of this report (which is a gendered issue in women’s basketball in general) was the large number of skill errors and turnovers. It does, however, indicate that the last thing coach Cullop wanted was for her team to feel satisfied that they beat Dayton, who is nationally ranked. As Cullop stated, “Great teams don’t slip up… And if they want to be a great team, then they have to find a way to pull out victories even in
times when you’re struggling”. This is exactly what UT did, they found a way to come together and beat IPFW 61-47. Naama Shafir led the Rockets with 14 points, eight assists, and six rebounds, and Tanika Mays with 11 points and four rebounds. Not only did they pull off the win but every UT player saw at least four minutes of play. As Allie Clifton stated, “…Not all wins are the prettiest, so I guess you could say it’s nice to get that win”. UT’s next opponent is at Southern Illinois-Edwardsville and then January 6th at home against Northern Illinois.

In “Rockets rain down 3’s in win”, published on 21 December, 2009, the focus of the article was on the victory against Southern Illinois University Edwardsville (SIUE) 86-74, and the thirteen 3-pointers UT drained (Staff The Toledo Blade, 2009c). This was only the second time for the season that the word “Women” was not included in the title. The article did not indicate the author, but it largely focused on the game statistics and did not quote any players. The article stated that Clare Aubry had a career-high five 3 pointers and leading the Rockets with 17 points. Also contributing to the 3 pointer frenzy was Jessica Williams who drained three. UT started the game off strong nailing three pointers and ran their offense smoothly. Then SIUE started to make a run so coach Cullop called a couple of timeouts in attempt to stop their momentum. It worked because then UT’s defense stepped up and got some big stops that allowed them to score on the offensive end. The only quotes in the article are from Coach Cullop. She stated, “I’m proud of our players…We found a way to win on the road”. The article concludes by saying that UT’s next opponent is at Indiana.

In a very short article entitled “UT women’s 5-game win streak snapped at Indiana”, published on 22 December, 2009, the focus of the article was that the end of
UT’s five game winning streak (Staff The Toledo Blade, 2009e). It was only a five sentence report. It indicated that Indiana University beat UT 73-63. Naama Shafir lead the Rockets with 18 points and five assists, along with Melissa Goodall with 12 points and Tanika Mays with 10 points. It concludes by saying that UT’s next opponent is Morehead State.

In “Quick start not enough as UT women’s 5-game win streak halted”, published on 23 December, 2009, the focus of the article was on the loss to Indiana that stopped UT’s 5-game winning streak (Staff Toledo Blade and News Services, 2009). Unfortunately (from a gendered perspective) the reason attributed for the win is identified as the skill errors from UT. Coach Cullop did not is quoted as saying that the skill errors were the reason for the loss – this came from the journalists who wrote the report. Cullop suggests that a lack of teamwork was crucial. “I thought we played like a bunch of individuals, and unfortunately that doesn’t work against a talented team like Indiana on the road”. Coach Cullop also suggested that the talented Indiana team deserved credit for their excellent play. The article also provides a statistical summary of the scoring. Naama Shafir lead the Rockets with 18 points and five assists, Melissa Goodall had 12 points, and Tanika Mays finished with 10 points and seven rebounds.

In “Ingersoll, Rockets women roll past Morehead State”, published on 30 December, 2009, the focus of the article was on UT’s win against Morehead State 77-61, and the individual accomplishments of Courtney Ingersoll (Staff The Toledo Blade, 2009a). Coach Cullop is quoted in 4 sentences, reducing the potential for gendered language. She is quoted as stating, “Courtney had the best game in her collegiate career… She seemed to make great play after great play tonight…” The Coach also
stated that by playing two solid halves, UT was able to seal the victory. Coach Cullop was extremely proud of her team for beating a talented Morehead State. Naama Shafir finished with 14 points and 10 assists, Tanika Mays with 15 points, and Melissa Goodall with 11 points and nine rebounds.

In “May scores 21 as University of Toledo wins 10th: Rockets knock off North Dakota”, published on 3 January, 2010, the focus of the article was on UT’s 10th win against North Dakota 74-59 (Staff The Toledo Blade, 2010b). Again, the title did not include the word “women” – but the article was not written by the regular Toledo Blade reporters. This is the first time that UT has begun the MAC play with double digit wins. Most of the report consisted of storing statistics. Tanika Mays lead the Rockets with 21 points and Naama Shafir finished the game with 16 points and nine assists. UT did a great job of executing on both ends of the floor and for the fourth time this year shot at least 50 percent from the field. They held North Dakota to 31.7 percent from the field and 19 percent from the 3 point line. As coach Cullop stated that she was proud of the team getting “a quality road win against a good opponent in a pretty tough environment”.

In “UT women clear slate as MAC play starts: Rockets focus on improving road game, but happy to be home”, published on 6 January, 2010, the focus of the article was on UT starting MAC play with a clean slate, or new season against Northern Illinois (Silka, 2010s). The regular The Toledo Blade reporter, Zach Silka, wrote this article and the Toledo Blade’s sub-editor’s habit of mentioning “Women” in the headline was again evident. The article indicated that the preleague portion of the team’s schedule was now over. “We’ve ended one chapter and now we’re beginning anew…We’re 0-0”, said Coach Cullop. The Coach is quoted in 11 sentences and there is also a headshot photo of
her. With all of the traveling and away games UT was very excited to have a home game. The article indicated that it is difficult to have a lot of road games but it is also very important to be able to find a way to win. With all the traveling and adversity the UT has faced, one important quality has come out of it: Coach Cullop has seen that she has multiple players that have the ability to step up and make a difference in a game. As coach Cullop stated, “I like the fact that we’ve had a lot of different leading scorers, because on any given night, someone on our team might have a poor shooting night. It’s just nice to know we have so many weapons in our arsenal”. The article also indicates that UT’s success has been phenomenal – it indicates that the team has achieved “a greater level of success than any team in UT history, to this point in the season”. Presumably, this refers to basketball teams, but whether this record applies to both the male and female teams is unclear.

In “Williams’ 3-pointer helps Rockets top Huskies”, published on 7 January 2010, the focus of the article was on the UT win against Northern Illinois 71-66, and the individual 3- point contribution of Jessica Williams (Silka, 2010x)0. This was the first time an article by Zach Silka did not have the word “women” in the headline. It is very descriptive of the plays and the changing lead in the game. (The lead changed five times during the game). The beginning of the game seemed to belong to UT, but as the game went on it became close. Northern Illinois started to make their shots and UT did not get stops on the defensive end. The lead continued to go back and forth until Williams hit the big three-point basket that sparked UT to finish the game with a win. The article also includes 9 sentences of quotes from the coach and 4 sentences of quotes from the players. One emphasis of the article is that Williams hit a key three pointer with 1:14 remaining in
the game to give UT the lead. Although Williams was not hitting a lot of her shots, her teammates had complete confidence in her and wanted her to keep shooting. Tanika Mays finished with 19 points and 11 rebounds, Melissa Goodall with 16 points and seven rebounds, Naama Shafir with 11 points and five assists, and Jessica Williams with six points. As coach Cullop stated, “I thought collectively as a team we found a way to win…I’m really proud of our kids. Different people stepped up”.

In “University of Toledo battles for 12th win: Mays helps Rockets overcome flu bug, Chippewas”, published on 10 January, 2010, the focus of the article is on the illnesses which the team had experienced (Silka, 2010o). Even though Tamika Mays was sick, she has been playing some of her best basketball. As coach Cullop stated in regards to Mays, “Here’s a kid that was sicker than a dog before Northern and still pushed through and had great numbers”. Mays ended the game with 19 points and 11 rebounds in the victory over Central Michigan, 74-60. Behind Mays in the scoring department was Clare Aubrey who ended the game with 13 points and Melissa Goodall with 10 points. The theme of the article was that UT overcame their obstacles in this game and found a way to win. Nevertheless, the author emphasizes the turnovers of the UT team. It indicates that UT had 19 turnovers.

In “University of Toledo focused on keeping streak alive”, published on 13 January, 2010, the article highlights the fact that the UT Women’s Basketball Team is ahead of most teams in their conference (Silka, 2010p). It states that a lot of the other teams are still working on putting in offenses and figuring out what works good for their team, but UT are ahead in that department. The Coach is quoted in six sentences and the players in three sentences. They emphasize the team’s eagerness, hard work, and the
importance of playing team roles. The article states that after losing to Northwestern, UT fought back and now has team chemistry that has allowed them to win the last four straight games. The article indicated that UT is constantly working to improve and will not let the success affect how hard they continue to work. They have won their last four games by an average of 12.5 points per game. As Clare Aubrey stated, “We’re glad to be on this run and we just know we have to work extremely hard to keep it up”. UT’s next opponent is Eastern Michigan, and whoever wins will get closer to the division title. The article suggested that UT should be able to count on Tanika Mays, who in the past two games had double-doubles, Naama Shafir who is averaging 13.5 points per game.

In “Mays keys Rockets: Career-high 28 points lead victory”, published on 14 January, 2010, the focus of the article was on the UT Women’s Basketball Team overcoming the obstacle of not having their two key players in the game against Eastern Michigan (Autullo, 2010a). The article was written by another reporter, Ryan Autullo. It suggests that Coach Cullop was inspired by watching men’s basketball. (Interestingly, there are almost no articles which would ever suggest that coaches of men’s teams would be inspired by watching women’s basketball). The article also stresses the injuries experienced by UT. With two key players recovering from injuries, the Rockets were able to defeat Eastern Michigan by displaying what Tanika Mays called their “mental toughness” and “maturity”. This was not an easy win by any means and as coach Cullop stated, “This was probably one of the more physical games we’ve played…” Tanika Mays ended the game with a career high 28 points and Melissa Goodall scored 14 points.

In “Ball State women cool off Rockets: Rough finish results in first MAC loss for UT”, published on 18 January 2010, the focus of the article was on the tough 73-69 loss
to Ball State University (Silka, 2010a). Every possession mattered in this game and unfortunately the Rockets were unable to pull off the win – attributed to the “crucial errors”, “missed rebounds” and “turnovers” of the UT team, rather than the good play of the Ball State team. The injuries of two key players are also mentioned: with Allie Clifton and Lisa Johnson both unable to play in the game it became even more important that other players step up. Tanika Mays led the Rockets with 20 points and her comment on the game was, “…this is a pretty hard loss, but I feel we did it to ourselves…we got frustrated and just let the game go”. Still after all of the injuries faced by the Rockets, they had a chance to win the game. However, after a missed 3-pointer by Jessica Williams, Ball State’s Audrey McDonald sealed the game by hitting two free throws. Coach Cullop is quoted as saying “The unfortunate thing is, it came down to the wire and you can’t let that happen on the road”.

In “Freshmen step up for the Rockets: Richardson, Smith life UT past Miami”, published on 24 January, 2010, the focus of the article was on the two freshmen, Yolanda Richardson and LeCretia Smith who aided in the Rockets win over Miami (Silka, 2010f). The two freshmen combined for 25 points, 22 rebounds, two blocks, and one steal. As Richardson stated, “I’m starting to get more comfortable out there on the court again… as I’m going along in the MAC season, I feel like I’m starting to get in to more of my game”. Unfortunately, one of the players uses the (often racialized) term of “a beast” to describe an African American player. Coming back from injury, Allie Clifton came in and grabbed some key rebounds that helped the Rockets. This win was far from easy however; the article stresses that UT’s shooting percentage was poor. Two of UT’s starting guards combined for 1 for 23 from the field. As coach Cullop stated, “…it’s so
good to know if you’re going to shoot that poorly, you can still win because you have people like Tanika and Yolanda step up”.

In “UT’s Mays rides hot streak into BGSU duel”, published on 29 January 2010, the focus of the article was on the individual contributions of Tanika Mays (Silka, 2010q). In the MAC play, she is averaging 20.4 points and 9.7 rebounds as the Rockets head to face up against rival Bowling Green University. Mays scored 20 points in six of the Rockets eight games in MAC play but said he is only concentrating on the upcoming game. Mays stated, “I guess it’s a good accomplishment but the season isn’t over, you just go game-by-game and play one game at a time”. Bowling Green’s head coach Kurt Miller said that he recognizes how important Mays is to UT’s success and knows that he has to come up with some way to slow her down. Miller stated that he thinks they are the underdog, and thinks this will be a great competitive game. Bowling Green has won the last 12 consecutive games between these two teams. This game should bring out the great rivalry between the two neighboring schools and as coach Cullop stated, “We hope this game will be a great attraction…and that we’ll be able to give them a better run for their money than we did last season”. The article also discusses the injuries experienced by the UT team – in particular, mentioning Lisa Johnson’s shoulder injury and Allie Clifton’s foot injury. The article makes a specific mention of the size of the crowd for women’s basketball – “…the matchup has area residents paying a little more attention to women’s basketball and UT officials urging spectators to purchase their tickets in advance or arrive one hour early because of the large turnout expected”. This emphasis on crowd size – while seemingly gender neutral – actually size reflects gender differences
itself. Rarely are such warnings given for male football games, for instance, despite similar crowd dynamics.

In “UT makes statement: Rockets end losing streak to Falcons”, published on 31 January, 2010, the focus of the article was of the Rockets beating their long-time rival, Bowling Green 66-63 (Silka, 2010r). With a record breaking crowd of 5,825 in Savage Arena, UT was able to end their losing streak to BG. Tanika Mays ended with 20 points and led the Rockets to victory. There was however some controversy following the game. BG Coach Kurt Miller stated, “They’ve made it very clear their win against us is more important than a West Division Championship…. Check their locker room”. (The BG coaching staff had entered UT’s player’s rooms and viewed their message board). The BG Coach also stated, “That was an unbelievable atmosphere for women’s basketball” (emphasis added). After the win Toledo fans rushed the floor to congratulate the Rockets. As Mays stated, “This is a big boost for us…We had people who were doubting us, and we proved them wrong”. The number of turnovers from Bowling Green was emphasized in the article.

In “Shafir revs up Rockets’ high-powered offense”, published on 3 February 2010, the focus of the article is on the individual contribution of Naama Shafir to the UT Women’s Basketball Team (Silka, 2010m). Interestingly, Shafir’s skills are identified by the coach as stemming from “her experience playing with the boys” where, “…the game is quicker and faster.” The assumed superiority of men’s basketball is evident throughout the article – even though Shafir states “I don’t know, to me, I’m just playing and I’m just trying to see everything”. She is identified as a player who has a strong influence on whether Toledo succeeds or not. Additionally, her turnover rate and number of goal
assists are discussed in detail. She is quoted as aiming to make decisions that are “the best for the team” and her improvement from the previous year is highlighted. Another player, Tanika Mays, is also discussed. She is identified as the “reigning MAC West Division player of the week” and UT coach Tricia Cullop is quoted as saying she is an “incredible asset” to the team who “could easily be our leading scorer if she wanted to be”, but she has decided to play unselfishly and share the ball with her teammates.

In “UT trips up OU Bobcats: Rockets shot 50 percent from field; Johnson had 13”, published on 7 February 2010, the Toledo Blade re-published an article which was written from an AAP journalist (AAP, 2010). It reviewed the 76 to 54 UT victory over Ohio University (OU) and the individual contribution of senior Lisa Johnson is emphasized. (Online, this article was re-titled “Johnson gives UT Women Lift: Scores 13 off bench as Rockets Shoot 50 percent”). The article mainly focuses on statistics. Lisa Johnson ended the game with 13 points and came off the bench to give the Rockets the spark they needed. Senior Tanika Mays added 12 points, Melissa Goodall with 11, and Naama Shafir with 10 points. The Rockets now have a record of 18-5 overall. With the loss to Kent State, the UT Rockets bounced back and came away with the win. Coach Cullop is quoted in three sentences, including stating, “I’m so proud of our response”.

In “Rockets women hope to clinch division: Tough week looms for top-ranked UT”, published on 10 February 2010, it is suggested that were will be a tough week ahead. UT is in first place of the West Division, one game ahead of Eastern Michigan and has to play Akron next (Silka, 2010l). Again, the term “women” plays a prominent role in the title. It is suggested that the week will challenge the mental toughness of the Rockets. Cullop stated, “We weren’t going to let them feel sorry for themselves…They didn’t
whine or complain, and I thought that showed the character that we need in order to win, home or away”. The article indicates that although last season UT was looked as the underdog that snuck up and took teams by surprise, this year they were the preseason favorite so it is more of a battle to stay on top and prove themselves every night. Cullop’s referencing to ‘whining’ and ‘complaining’ raises the unfortunate specter of the “nagging women” stereotype. However, in general, she emphasizes a different message: the need for mental toughness, maintaining focus, and demanding physical workouts. All of these messages challenge traditional stereotypes about women.

In “UT women soar by Akron: Shafir leads Rockets with Mays injured”, published on 11 February 2010, the term “women” is again used in the title. The focus of the article is on the Rockets victory over Akron 74-68 and the individual contributions of Naama Shafir (Silka, 2010w). With Tanika Mays being unable to play due to a hyperextended knee, Shafir led the Rockets with 27 points, 7 assists, and three steals. She stated, “I knew before the game that I needed to step up”. Playing without Mays and Clifton was difficult but as Lisa Johnson stated, “Tankia and Allie bring a lot of heart to this team, but we kind of proved to ourselves that it doesn’t matter who’s playing…” The Rockets next home game on Saturday with be the Susan G. Komen game where UT will be wearing pink jerseys. The gendering of “pink” as a symbol for breast cancer is a major topic in itself, which is largely beyond the scope of this thesis, and it has been explored elsewhere (King, 2008). Nevertheless, it is important to at least acknowledge (at least in passing) the connections between the color pink and traditional notions of femininity.
In “Inspired Rockets blast Broncos: Victory over Western 11th in a row at Savage”, published on 14 February 2010, the focus of the article is on the Rockets 11th straight win and victory over Western Michigan 65-41 on the day of the Susan G. Komen fundraising game (Silka, 2010g). One of UT’s Igniters (fans) was just recently diagnosed with cancer so this game had a special significance for the Rockets. As Lisa Johnson stated in regards to the news, “We just found out about that a couple days ago, so it kind of made this game a little more special and a little closer to our hearts, because we actually know someone who is fighting the disease”. After the game the Rockets auctioned off their pink jerseys where a lot of money was raised. The article does not mention an interesting gender difference regarding college basketball and this symbolism: while women’s teams wear pink jerseys, men’s teams do not. Instead, only the coaching staff wears pink, and even then, they wear it on a much smaller part of their attire (such as a pink tie, or a pink ribbon). In terms of the game, however, the article indicated that Shafir ended the game with 19 points and seven assists. The Rockets defense won them this game and the article suggested it was a special night winning on the Susan G. Komen event.

In “UT women clip Ball State to clinch MAC West”, published on February 28 2010, the focus of the article was on UT beating Ball State 62-48 and clinching the MAC West Division title in front of 4,308 fans (Silka, 2010t). The team is identified by its gender again – with the word “women” in a prominent place in the headline. The article quoted Lisa Johnson as indicating that the Rockets were unable to cut down the nets after the game because the UT men played after them – but this gender dynamic is dismissed by a reference to such a statement “drawing laughter”. LeCretia Smith is identified as
playing a big role in the win over Ball State. Smith ended with 10 points and 9 rebounds. Cullop stated, “LeCretia Smith had an outstanding game. Every time I thought we had a good look that didn’t go in, all of a sudden you saw her soaring to the basket, grabbing a rebound, and either putting it in or getting fouled”.

In “Coach’s remarks motivate University of Toledo women”, published on 2 March 2010, the word “women” is again used, though this time it is at the end of the headline (Silka, 2010c). The article discusses UT’s upcoming game against Eastern Michigan. In particular, AnnMarie Gilbert, the Eastern Michigan coach, has criticized UT and this may possibly be a motivational tool for the Rockets. Gilbert stated that although UT beat Bowling Green, “Bowling Green is the best basketball team in the Mid-American Conference, I just think Bowling Green is a smarter basketball team. They have more talent at each position than Toledo, and they’re just a little bit older and wiser than Toledo”. This comment from Eastern Michigan’s coach may give the Rockets great momentum going into the tournament. Lisa Johnson is quoted as stating, “When a coach says that about your team, it only just makes your expectations of your own team even higher. When she says something like that, you just want to prove her wrong”. The injuries to Tanika Mays and Allie Clifton are discussed, and Courtney Ingersoll is reported as “battling an illness”.

In “Eastern Michigan outlasts UT women in OT: Turnovers plague Rockets in finale”, published on 3 March 2010, the article discusses on the Rockets overtime loss to Eastern Michigan 89-84. (Silka, 2010e) Again, word “women” is used in the title, and the outcome of a women’s game is attributed to the mistakes of one team, rather than the skills or motivation of the other. Senior Tanika Mays led the Rockets with 23 points, 12
rebounds, and two steals. As she stated, “We didn’t come to ready to play tonight, and it showed…” The Rockets went into half time being down 31-26 and then in the second half came to life and took the lead at the 9:27 mark. Unfortunately, the article suggests, in overtime the turnovers and missed shots plagued UT.

In “UT women enter MAC tournament without Johnson”, published on 10 March 2010, the focus of the article is on the Rockets heading into the MAC tournament and playing without their senior Lisa Johnson (Silka, 2010v). Lisa Johnson was unable to play because of a torn Anterior Cruciate Ligament and Medial Cruciate Ligament, which occurred in the previous game against Eastern Michigan. It is also noted that Johnson had a left shoulder injury earlier in the season. Allie Clifton, who is reported to have a “chronic right foot injury”, stated that Johnson’s injury affected her deeply, “I definitely was in shock for a couple of days after I found out, and I think I still am”. Johnson was a hard worker who brought a lot of leadership to the Rockets. Tanika Mays is also noted to have “sat out all or part of three games with a knee injury last month”. As indicated earlier in the thesis, such injuries occur with increased frequency in women’s basketball. And again, as is so common in The Toledo Blade, the gender of the team is mentioned in the headline.

The article also indicates that because of the loss Mays, Goodall, Richardson and Smith will have to play more minutes. It is suggested that the Rockets have faced adversity all year and will once again have to face it because of a serious injury. Cullop stated, “I don’t think I’ve ever coached a season where we’ve missed so many key players at different times”. The article concludes that it is tournament time and time for everyone on the UT Rockets to step up. The article suggests that “emotion” plays a big
part in determining whether a team wins or not. This term, emotion, arguably seems less
forceful and perhaps more gendered than the words “motivation”, “emotional strength” or
“determination”, which arguably have more masculine connotations.

In “UT women dash by Ball State: Rockets shake off rough first half to reach
MAC semifinals”, published on 11 March 2010, the focus of the article is on UT beating
Ball State in the MAC semifinals 67-56 (Silka, 2010u). The gendered reporting patterns
noted throughout this thesis are again evident: the sex of the team is identified in the
headline and the first section of the article emphasizes the errors committed by UT. For
instance, it indicates that UT only had a 43% shooting percentage, and “allowing” a Ball
State player to score 16 points. Such an emphasis does not only come from the journalist,
however. Tanika Mays is quoted as stating, “We just weren’t playing our game. We were
letting things get out of hand”. In the second half, UT picked up their defensive effort and
help Ball State to 33 percent for the field. Shafir led the Rockets with 18 points and seven
assists, Melissa Goodall with 14 points and 11 rebounds, and Jessica Williams with 9
points. As coach Cullop stated in regards to the game, “I thought in the second half our
players were a lot more inspired than we were in the first half…. But I thought we finally
settled into the passionate play that has gotten us this far”.

In “Rockets women focused on shot in championship game”, published on 12
March 2010, the article discusses the upcoming game against Kent State and heading into
the championship game (Silka, 2010k). The word “women” is again evident in the title.
The article indicates that UT, a preseason favorite to win the MAC West Division, is now
looking forward to their next game. Their victory over Ball State was far from easy but
with their dominant play in the second half they proved they deserved the win. Coach
Cullop is quoted in nine sentences, and she focuses on the passion, intensity, effort and physicality of the game. This is an interesting antidote to traditional notions of femininity. The article indicates that the Coach believes such intensity and passion will need to continue into the upcoming game if they hope to advance to the championship game.

In “University of Toledo Rockets get shot at MAC title”, published on 13 March 2010, the Rockets advancing to the championship game against Bowling Green is reported (Autullo, 2010b). BG just beat Akron and UT beat Kent State and they will now face each other. Because of the season UT has had even if they lose they have a good chance to play in the WNIT. In UT’s game against Kent State they seemed to be in control of the game until in the second half when (according to the article) they “began to perform horribly”. Coach Cullop had made a comment that she was starting to get grey hairs during this game because of the stress level. Along with grey hairs she stated, “If you ever want to give a coach a heart attack, have no timeouts and be fumbling the ball, and don’t make your free throws at the end of the game”. UT pushed through and pulled out the victory. Coach Cullop did emphasize the positives of the game, however, indicating that Yolanda Richardson did a great job in the paint for them and was a huge contributor to the win. She also stated that she thinks UT fans are excited to see the BG versus UT matchup again but couldn’t speak for the BG fans because she knows they don’t like her.

In “Bowling Green tops University of Toledo for MAC tourney title”, published on 14 March 2010, the focus of the article is on BG beating UT 66-63 in the championship game of the MAC tournament (Silka, 2010b). Even though UT won the
first matchup between these two teams, they were unable to control the MAC title. The win is partly attributed to the way “the Falcons out-muscled UT in the post”. This is a (relatively rare) case where a newspaper reports that muscularity – which is so often used to describe men’s sports – is applied to women’s basketball. The report does include statistics, such as the fact that BG’s Lauren Prochaska earned the tournament MVP and ended with 29 points and seven rebounds. BG’s head coach is reported as saying he was very confident in Prochaska and told her it was time for her to “step up”, and she did. The game was far from an easy win for BG; at the beginning of the game, UT could not miss and were ahead 22-12. At the half the score was 29-24 and UT came out in the second half strong by going on a 6-0 run. But then BG started to make their run and was able to take the lead. Tanika Mays stated in regards to the loss, “It’s really disappointing. This is a tough loss. This was a really winnable game for us”. BG will be looking forward to seeing whom they will play in the NCAA tournament while UT has a good chance to play in the WNIT.

In “Rockets thrilled for chance to keep playing: UT hosting Pittsburgh in Women’s NIT”, published on 17 March 2010, the focus of the article is on UT’s wonderful opportunity to play in the WNIT with their first game against Pittsburgh (Silka, 2010j). In this case, the entire tournament is gendered as the “Women’s NIT”. Coach Cullop stated in regards to the upcoming game, “We’re really excited…It’s a great opportunity for us. It’s been a goal of ours from the beginning of the season to play in the postseason”. The Rockets now feel excited to know that their loss against BG was not the end to their season. It is a huge accomplishment that UT is hosting the game against Pittsburgh and just shows how dedicated the Rockets fans are to the program. If UT wins
they will play the winner of the Kent State–Michigan matchup. Interestingly, the prices of tickets are also discussed: $13 for reserved seats, $11 for general admission, $6 for children 12 and under, and $5 for UT students. (The pricing of tickets is also gendered: men’s basketball games have a much higher admission fee – but this is not addressed in the article).

In “University of Toledo cruises by Pitt in WNIT: Shafir scores 23 points”, published on 20 March 2010, the focus of the article is on the win against Pitt 70-58, and the individual contributions of Naama Shafir (Silka, 2010n). It is suggested by Coach Cullop that this game demonstrated how much UT deserves to keep playing in the postseason. This victory was UT’s first postseason win since 1998. Shafir ended the game with 23 points, five rebounds, and two steals while Jessica Williams also came in knocking down three’s that sparked the Rockets. UT shot 61 percent from the field in the first half and was able to hold Pitt to 39 percent. Even when Pitt stated to make a run, it was Shafir driving to the basket and reading their defense that put an end to the run. While Coach Cullop usually avoids gendered language, on this occasion she is quoted as stating “… I thought she (Shafir) buckled down and read the scenes. And man, when it opened up she exploded to the basket.” This is an important reminder that gendered language can be both written by a journalist, and also spoken by the people who are interviewed in the press.

In “University of Toledo’s Williams is just going to keep shooting”, published on 20 March 2010, the focus of the article is on the individual contributions of Jessica Williams and her 3 point shots (Blade, 2010). In the Pittsburgh game, Williams had six threes and finished with 18 points. Williams unique shooting style is discussed in the
report. She has a unique shot, but regardless hits more often than not. As Williams stated in regards to her shooting form, “I have a weird dip. I sort of catch, dip, and shoot it”. A lot of her previous coaches have tried to change her form with the exception of Coach Cullop. As she stated, “Jessica has found something that works for her. The biggest thing for me was to step back, not over-coach and stay out of her way”. Williams six threes kept Pitt from coming back in the game and her teammates did a great job of giving her the ball when she was open. UT’s next game will be against Michigan. The emphasis on the positive aspects of UT’s play, rather than their errors, seemed different to many previous reports. (This may be a reflection of being authored by Dave Hackenberg, rather than the regular The Toledo Blade reporter, Zach Silka). The title is also not gendered on this occasion.

In “Rockets facing familiar foe in Wolverines in WNIT tilt”, published on 21 March 2010, the focus of the article is on the Rockets upcoming game against Michigan (Silka, 2010i). The report indicates that earlier in the year, UT and Michigan had a closed-door scrimmage and once again they will face each other - but this time it will be in the second round of the WNIT. The rivalry between opposing coaches is emphasized: this is not the first time Coach Cullop has faced head Coach Kevin Borseth; they had played each other at both of their previous schools. As Coach Cullop stated, “I have a lot of respect for Kevin”. The article indicates that Coach Cullop will be looking at the scrimmage footage and will then come up with a game plan. The winner of the game will play the winner of Northwestern- St. Bonaventure.

In “Cold shooting dooms UT women: Michigan takes advantage in WNIT second-round game”, published on 22 March 2010, the story reports UT loss to Michigan
72-57 (Silka, 2010d). It once again blames the errors of UT, rather than the skill of the opponents, for the result of the match. A “woeful shooting streak” is said to have “doomed the Rockets”. However, unlike many other reports, this article does acknowledge that “The Wolverines, conversely, shot a blazing 57.7% (15-of-26) after intermission”. This loss put an end to UT’s season. Nevertheless, it was a great season for UT and has set the bar high for the next year’s team. Michigan shot 57.7 percent in the second half taking over the game. One of Michigan’s keys was to keep the ball out of Shafir’s hands, but she pushed through and ended the game with 23 points. Shafir’s scoring just wasn’t enough. Tanika Mays also emphasized UT’s failures, stating, “I feel like we took breaks throughout the game instead of being consistent throughout”.

In “Injuries worst enemy for successful University of Toledo women”, published on 24 March 2010, the focus of the article is on the adversity and the injuries the UT team faced throughout the entire season (Staff The Toledo Blade, 2010a). Andola Dortch was out with an ACL tear, Allie Clifton experienced plantar fasciitis, Tanika Mays hyperextended her knee, and Lisa Johnson had an ACL and MCL tear. This is a lot of adversity that had to be dealt with the entire season. Regardless, the Rockets were still able to win the MAC West Division, make it to the championship game in the MAC tournament, and the second round in the WNIT. The article asks various “what if” questions, suggesting that if they didn’t have to face all of those injuries; UT may have been more successful. However, Coach Cullop year, “We made the most, I think, of what we had”. She was very proud of her team and what they had accomplished. Looking on to next year she hopes that they will be able to get an NCAA bid and will have another exciting year.
Conclusion

This chapter has examined every story published about The University of Toledo’s Women’s Basketball Team in *The Toledo Blade* during the 2009-2010 season – 46 in total. It has shown that the coverage of the team has been gendered – for instance, losses are often attributed to skill errors rather than the good play of other teams, family connections and domestic themes are often discussed (a pattern which is almost entirely absent from reports about men’s basketball). Indeed, on ten occasions (two of which the University of Toledo team won), the result of the game was attributed to the errors of one team, as opposed to the good play of another. There were 29 games in total, and the results of more than one third of these games (10 in total) were attributed to errors. The fact that it was “Women’s” basketball was also continually emphasized in the headlines – “Men’s” basketball reporting rarely emphasizes gender. In total, there were 29 references to “Women” in the headlines of the 46 reports about the team in the 2009/2010 season. (That is in the headlines and not simply the story). This amounted to 63% of all reports about the team. Injuries, which happen at a far higher rate in women’s basketball, were reported in twelve articles (26% of all reports). Another interesting aspect of the stories from *The Toledo Blade* is that they never once recognized that the women in The University of Toledo Basketball Team were student-athletes. This fact was never mentioned in even one article. Given the importance of academic success (and academic achievement) in the lives of these women, this omission is a serious concern.
Chapter 5

Conclusion

This thesis has examined the academic and athletic motivations of The University of Toledo Women’s Basketball Team and has utilized a holistic approach to examine their experiences. It has emphasized the transferability of the skills and values they learn playing basketball: values such as hard work, persistence, and the importance of setting priorities in order to meet competing academic, personal, and athletic obligations. Student-athletes were aware of the importance of both academic and athletic success, and they had higher graduation rates than their male counterparts at The University of Toledo. This pattern of higher graduation rates is repeated nationally – perhaps indicating that female basketball players place a stronger emphasis on academic success than their male counterparts. Additionally, female basketball players were strongly aware of the gender differences between themselves and their male counterparts. The significance of such gender differences in the motivations of student-athletes has not previously been explored through the standard methodological tools such as SAMSAQ and AIMS. They were aware of the different social reception of male and female college basketball.

The review of reporting in The Toledo Blade revealed significant gender dimensions in newspaper articles as well. For instance, the fact that it was “women’s”
basketball was continually emphasized – marking it out, deliberately, from the assumed norm of male basketball. The domestic lives (and family connections) of female basketball players were included in reports – and on one occasion, an article reported the movie they saw, and the reported them going out for Thanksgiving Dinner. Such domestic themes are rarely reported in men’s basketball.

Another important aspect of the reporting in The Toledo Blade was that every report about women’s basketball was written by a man. This may reflect a domination of sports writing by men, but it also may indicate that there are gendered barriers in many areas related to women’s basketball as well. Most of the reports were written by Zach Silka, and unfortunately, he indicated that he had never considered any gendered issues when it came to reporting women’s basketball. This gender-blindness meant that he did not note the higher rate of injuries in women’s basketball documented earlier in the thesis. It also meant that he did not recognize, or emphasize, gender differences between the University of Toledo’s Men’s and Women’s Basketball Teams – even when the differences were so obvious as wearing different clothes in the “Race for the Cure” games. Every female basketball player wore a pink jersey, dedicated to breast cancer awareness, for this game. No male basketball player wore a pink jersey – though the coaches wore a small lapel. This was a significant difference which deserved recognition in the reports – but was not mentioned in The Toledo Blade.

Contributions to the literature

The thesis made a number of contributions to the literature. First, it analyzed a topic which is important – female college basketball – that has been generally under-
studied relative to men’s college basketball. This is important, given the different ethnic make-up, graduation rates, rules, and level of injuries in men’s and women’s basketball. Injuries were a particular concern to the women in this research, and the literature review suggested that such injuries occur far more often in women’s basketball than in men’s basketball.

Another contribution of the thesis was that it adopted a holistic approach to female college basketball – not simply focusing on athletics, or academics, but studying both issues, and their interactions. This is consistent with the recognition that these women are student-athletes; they have dual obligations to themselves and the university as students and athletes. By using both qualitative and quantitative evidence, the thesis highlighted many different aspects of the motivations of these student athletes.

The thesis also contributed to the literature by examining the gender dynamics in reporting by a regional newspaper. The literature review in this thesis seemed to suggest that most studies have been of major newspapers or other media (such as ESPN), but there were no studies of regional reporting.

**Limitations**

This thesis studied one basketball team only, in one season, and also described in detail the reporting in one regional paper, *The Toledo Blade*. This means that it cannot generalize to other seasons, other teams, or other newspapers. However, previous studies have suggested that there are gendered differences in such reporting, so it may be suggested that gendered differences do generally occur – even if they are different in different regions, papers, or teams.
Further research

There is a clear need for more research on women’s college basketball. The literature review suggested that it was under-studied relative to men’s college basketball, perhaps reflecting the lower profile of women’s sports and wider gender differences in power throughout society. Themes of muscularity and aggression are widely assumed to be male attributes; they are an important feature of women’s sports, but they are rarely recognized. This research has shown that such themes – aggression, competitiveness, hard work, and persistence, are emphasized both athletically and academically by coaches and players alike. There is a need to study the extent to which such themes are important in the athletic and academic motivations of student-athletes in other teams, and competitions.

Additionally, there is a need to study the gender dynamics which occur in press reporting in other regional newspapers. This thesis broke new ground in exploring the topic of regional newspapers, but it cannot be automatically assumed that these findings apply to other regional newspapers as well.
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Appendix A

Interview: Zach Silka, December 16, 2010

Are the word counts the same for Men’s and Women’s basketball?

The word counts are for the most part the same, 15 inches (1 inch = 40 words). It varies from game to game depending on the teams playing and the outcome. For instance, the BG vs. Toledo game might get more coverage because of the rivalry.

What kind of things do editors look for in reporting Women’s basketball?

They look for the same things in both Men’s and Women’s games, clarity, writing “tight”, which means getting the point across in few words.

Do you think the reporting of WBB has changed over the years? If so, how?

Yes, it has changed a lot. With the rise in equality women’s sports in general has gained more coverage. In Toledo for instance, women’s basketball is highly followed and has a good team so there is a lot of coverage. The Toledo Blade makes sure to cover the games.

How has reporting online changed the style of reporting and the number of photographs?

Online reporting allows the fans to have instance access to what happened in a game. For the most part The Toledo Blade will produce a small article (3-4 paragraphs) directly after the game so that whoever could not make it would have a summary of what happened. They can then tune in the next morning to view a full article about the game. Online has made everything more instant and accessible. It also allows for people to view more photographs from the game, with additional information boxes.

Do you write the captioning for the photos? There have been mistakes.

No, I do not do the captioning for the photographs, the copy editors do.

Do you have a goal of how much you report/quote the players/coach?
For the most part there is at least one quote from the coach and one quote from a player but it varies from game to game. It also depends on how good the quotes are and who he was able to interview.

*Is there a difference in the language you use for WBB or MBB?*

No not that I notice. The whole goal is to cover just like I would for a men’s team. I try to use the same language, but has never really thought about it.

*Do you notice any differences in the reporting of men’s UT basketball and UT women’s basketball?*

It is much easier to talk to female athletes. They are, for the most part, more open and willing to talk to reporters. For instance, the whole Naama story with her family and her background. The fans have pretty good knowledge of Naama and her family. I really enjoy covering WBB. The men’s teams have more of a “hands off” approach.