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Hardin, Marie. Family (Sports) Television: Exploring Cultural Power, Domestic Leisure, and Fandom in the Modern Context. Sports and Identity: New Agendas in Communication. Brummet, Barry and Andrew W. Ishak. eds. New York. Routledge. 2013. 0415711916. pp. 262-279.

Date prepared: 01/06/2014

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FAMILY (SPORTS) TELEVISION

Exploring Cultural Power, Domestic Leisure,
and Fandom in the Modern Context

Marie Hardin

Although there is no doubt that the form by which it is both consumed and monetized is quickly changing, television—for all the predictions of its demise—still reigns as a form of domestic entertainment and as a cultural force (Brown & Barkhuus, 2011; Iger, 2012). Furthermore, the place of television in relationship to the genre of sports entertainment is especially strong, as evidenced by the continuing investment by media conglomerates in leagues and in escalating rights fees (Baker & Richwine, 2012). During any given week of the year when a major men's sports league is active in the United States (and that is almost every week), television ratings data reflect the supremacy of sports as a draw for television viewers. Consider 2011: Nielsen data indicates that 9 of the top-10 rated shows on television were sporting events (Nielsen, 2011). And as television adapts to new, digital platforms, consumers are following it there. During the 2012 London Olympics, for instance, 8 million people downloaded NBC's mobile application for streaming video to their phones or tablets; at the same time, the network's prime-time audience (in front of the conventional television) was not eroded. The takeaway by NBC: more platforms for programming seem to result in more viewing in the traditional sense (that is, in front of a television set), not less (Chozick, 2012).

A great deal of research has examined the relationship of sport fans with television over the years, mostly through a quantitative, media-effects lens in seeking to answer questions about fans' motivations for watching sports and the impact of that consumption. In recent years, some studies have attempted to recognize the differences between the experiences and behavior of men and women relating to mediated sports consumption (Gantz *et al.*, 2006; Ruihley & Billings, 2012; Tang & Cooper, 2012; Whiteside & Hardin, 2012). Much of this

research has been driven in part by the exploration of reasons for the failure of women's sports programming, in general, to reach "critical mass" in terms of audience more than 40 years after Title IX.

The substantive answers, however, to questions surrounding why women's sports programming has not gained "critical mass" might lie in research that takes a different approach to questions about fandom, sports consumption, and gender. In other words, instead of focusing solely on *content*, perhaps we should be looking at other factors, such as the way television sports viewing, in general, fits into the lives of viewers. In this chapter, I explore the use of qualitative, semi-ethnographic inquiry in audience studies of sports fans through a yearlong pilot study that examines, in depth, the ways sport entertainment is integrated into the lives of a single U.S. family: a middle-class, heterosexual married couple with school-aged children living in the suburbs of a major U.S. city.

The primary focus of this inquiry—the beginning of a larger, longitudinal, multi-family project—is on the complex, interconnected practices around leisure, media consumption, sports fandom, gender, and the (evolving) family unit. I believe such research can be highly fruitful in our understanding of the ways sport is consumed and understood and, consequently, in our tackling the thorny questions around the diminished visibility of women's sports in U.S. culture.

Literature Review

David Morley's research on television audiences, including *Family Television* (1986), is widely considered pioneering work in our understanding of the ways television is integrated into domestic life (Couldry, 2011; Fiske, 2011). Morley's work was pivotal in turning the attention of media scholars towards issues of gender, power, and familial roles as they considered the way individuals interacted with the TV set (Hall, 1986). He asserted that the "unit of analysis" for television consumption ought to be viewed as the "family/household rather than the individual viewer" (p. 15) and that it should be considered within the wider context of domestic life; or, put another way: "household preferences influence the household members' media choices" (Vettehen *et al.*, 2012, p. 5). Morley added: "[T]elevision viewing can be seen to structure—and be structured—by other leisure activities, in different ways for viewers in different social/familial positions." Morley also recognized that household labor and familial responsibilities were part of that structuring/structured component, a common understanding among contemporary television scholars (Briggs, 2010; Brown & Barkhuus, 2011).

I will not attempt here to review in detail Morley's book-length *Family Television* work, which involved in-depth interviews with families about their lives around television. Instead, I will focus on his conclusions related to the role

of gender, which he saw as a “structural principle working across all the families interviewed” (p. 146). Morley noted differences in styles of viewing; men were able to “tune out” the environment to tune into television programming. On the other hand, Morley wrote that “many of the women feel that just to watch television without doing anything else at the same time would be an indefensible waste of time, given their sense of family obligations” (p. 150). Morley also observed differences in the expressed desire of the women and men he interviewed to watch television solo but also to express guilt about doing so. Finally, of interest to this research was his observation that men identified more readily with a preference for “factual” shows (non-fiction) and women more with dramas and other scripted genres.

Importantly, Morley was careful to distinguish his conclusions as drawn *not* about the characteristics of men and women, but rather, as “characteristics of the domestic roles of masculinity and femininity” (p. 152). The conclusions of James Lull (1991), also on television, leisure, and family relations, were along the same lines. Lull noted the prominent role played by fathers in control of television content in the home and the ways women were disempowered—sapping television as a leisure-time option for women in the same ways it was for men, as TV time was essentially built around the family patriarch. Walker’s (1996) research on the power dynamics around the remote control and other, more recent research on viewing patterns in the home, reinforce Lull’s conclusions (Vettehen *et al.*, 2012). Walker, who interviewed couples about their television viewing, concluded:

Joint television watching in heterosexual couples is hardly an egalitarian experience ... [C]ouples watching television are not simply passive couch potatoes. They are doing gender, that is, acting in ways consistent with social structures and helping to create and maintain them at the same time. (p. 820)

Perhaps this dynamic is part of the reason Janice Radway’s (1984) research found that women identified reading novels (romance, in particular) with leisure time; no one else could control the selection of content, and during those moments, no “emotion work” was demanded from family members (Erickson, 2005, p. 338).

In my own recent work that might be considered a precursor to this study, I worked with my colleague Erin Whiteside (2011) to explore the idea of emotion work and its relationship to the ways women talked about their sports consumption. We interviewed 19 middle-class, married women about their interest in mediated sports, especially those involving female athletes. The ways women talked about the way sports fit into their lives seemed to echo the ideas of Morley (1986) and the others I have discussed thus far, reinforcing the

idea that (televised) sports consumption, to be understood, must be considered in the context of the domestic unit, with an understanding of the way roles of masculinity and femininity are played out within. This research seeks to consider sports consumption within this context.

Sports, Television, and Gender

Of course, the work of Morley and others during the 1980s and 1990s must be considered in light of the technological advancements that erode the assumptions under which these scholars worked. For instance, the rise of the digital technology has released us from the spatial and time constraints that required “appointment viewing” (or the use of a VCR) for popular television shows. Furthermore, the dramatic increase in the ways in which television can be consumed—on devices that can fit in one’s palm—has also perhaps eroded the socializing function of television. In an era where people can watch in isolation, walled off by a pair of headphones, in virtually any environment they choose, the idea of gathering around a communal set to share the experience might seem *passé* (Carr, 2012).

Except, one could argue, in relation to *sports*. Spectator sports events, which support growing fantasy and gaming industries, may be considered one of the last bastions of “appointment viewing” as fans insist on consuming these events in real time (Carr, 2012; Donohue, 2012). In turn, TV and cable network executives have put considerable resources into securing the rights for sporting events, betting that the value of such rights will appreciate because of the unique position of sports to draw viewers, at a specific time and to a specific channel, to see a big event (Baker & Richwine, 2012; Donohue, 2012). Consuming sports events is also still culturally (and, one could argue, uniquely) understood as an ideally communal event; that is, sports produces the kind of programming around which shared experiences are common (Kraszewski, 2008; Nylund, 2007; Smart, 2005). Whannel’s (1998) assertion that sports are “more likely to be watched in communal viewing situations, whether in living rooms, or bars, than most forms of television” seems to still be true; the mediated experience often mimics that in the stadium or arena, where viewers gather to share the spectacle. Research also indicates that sports fans behave differently toward the object of their devotion than do fans of other entertainment genres (Gantz *et al.*, 2006), stretching out the rituals of fandom “as long as possible” (p. 114) by using media and talking with other fans before and after a sports event.

Despite the elements of sports programming that make it more likely to be consumed in ways that once were the norm for all genres in the home, cultural scholars who focus on audience in the domestic space have paid little or no attention to mediated sports. Morley’s (1986) work has only a few passing references, and newer studies have generally followed suit. Instead, audience-

related research around sports has generally been conducted through quantitative studies that explore fan motivations for consumption and the effects of that consumption. Raney (2006) summarizes the general thrust of such research: "[S]ports media consumers report being motivated by emotional, cognitive, and behavioral or social needs when they view mediated sports" (p. 315). Raney notes some research that has touched on "social motivations" for consumption, including the motivation for group affiliation and companionship, including with family members. Research by Wann and colleagues (2001) indicates that married individuals are more likely than those who are not married to express family-related motivation. Survey research has also found that women are more likely to report being motivated by family relationships to watch sports on television (Dietz-Uhler *et al.*, 2000; Gantz & Wenner, 1991); Gantz and Wenner also noted differences in the attention women and men reported putting on televised sports: women reported putting less focused attention on the game than did men.

Other recent survey research has explored differences between men and women in expressions of fandom and mediated sports consumption. A study of male and female fantasy sports participants found that male players consumed far more televised sports events on a weekly basis and ranked sports as a more important part of their leisure time than did women who reported playing (Ruihley & Billings, 2012). Tang and Cooper (2012) surveyed male and female college students about their Olympic viewing (television and web streaming) and found differences in predictors for viewing. The strongest predictor for men's Olympic consumption was, simply, time in front of a TV set. The strongest predictor for women was a preference for Olympic sports, many of which do not get regular, year-round television coverage but also offer the rare opportunity for women to watch elite female athletes compete. Research has consistently found that the Olympics draw a larger percentage of female viewers than other sporting contests.

What and Why Women Watch

Indeed, part of the reason women are, in general, less avid sports fans (Gantz *et al.*, 2006; Tang & Cooper, 2012) could be because there is far less opportunity for women to watch female athletes compete on television. Research over the past four decades has consistently documented—to the point of becoming banal—the dearth of women's sports coverage in comparison to that of men's; the daily flagship news show on ESPN ("SportsCenter"), for instance, devotes less than 2 percent of its airtime to women's sports, and the network devoted just 8 percent of its overall programming to women's sports in 2010 (Messner & Cooky, 2010; Tang & Cooper, 2012; Thomas, 2010). Women's sports competition has become more visible in recent years, however, mostly because of the need for

programming created by the proliferation of regional cable sports networks and online ventures such as *espnW*, a website launched in 2010 with content aimed at fans of women's sports (McBride, 2011; Voepel, 2012). Women's sports advocates have long argued that there is a pent-up demand for such content and that if networks will "build (and nurture) it" fans will materialize (Love, 2010).

Sports media producers, however, argue that women are not particularly attracted to women's sports content (McBride, 2011). According to ESPN's market research, for instance, more men than women watch the WNBA and the women's college softball tournament. Of course, more men than women watch men's sports, too: ESPN estimated in 2010 that 70 percent of its 18–49 prime-time demographic were men, and according to league research that same year, men were 66 percent of football fans, 55 percent of baseball fans, and 64 percent of basketball fans (ESPN, 2010; Thomas, 2010). Major U.S. sports leagues such as the NFL and MLB have put concerted effort into wooing female fans; the NFL, for instance, launched several product marketing campaigns, including those dubbed "shrink it and pink it" and "Fit for You," aimed at women (Manahan, 2011).

In addition, scholars have put increased attention on understanding the female sports fan. Two books, both published in 2012, present research on the process of female fandom (Markovits & Albertson, 2012; Toffoletti & Mewett, 2012). In *Sportista*, Markovits and Albertson argue that female sports fans are different from male fans in the lower priority they put on pre- and post-game analysis. In other words, "they 'speak' sports differently from and remain largely unaccepted by men" (Marchman, 2012, para. 5). Pope (2012) used interviews with 85 female fans of soccer and rugby in the United Kingdom to assert that performances of femininity complicate simple understanding of female sports fans. As fans, women "explore their 'backstage' (Goffman, 1990) and escape other, more constraining feminine identities" (p. 17). The question remains. How do the differences in the enactment of fandom and "performances of femininity" manifest in the domestic setting for sports viewing?

This Research

As I have reviewed the seminal cultural-studies work of Morley and others on the television audience, I have considered an altogether different approach to questions around the audience for mediated sports—especially those regarding gender. I designed this project to use a cultural studies approach (situating the study of fans in the environment in which they watch, with an understanding of the *unit* of consumption to be the family/household) with questions traditionally explored by sports-media scholars through different methods and through theoretical lenses that stress individual emotive and cognitive processes. I launched this research to explore the possibilities for a wider, longitudinal study

that explores the complex practices around leisure, media consumption, sports fandom, gender, and the (evolving) family unit in the United States. My goal is to understand how these interconnected, interdependent relationships (and practices) reinforce—and may, over time, challenge—hegemonic values in the media/sport complex.

Method: The “Unit of Analysis” and Data Collection

As I will discuss later in more detail, I realized that the one family I chose for this initial study would, by necessity, limit my findings; no single family unit is representative of an increasingly diverse array of family arrangements in the United States. Thus, I prioritized the factors I was most interested in exploring for this research: I was interested in a heterosexual, married couple with school-aged children, living in an area that identified with major sports teams. I wanted a heterosexual couple because of the assertions by Morley (1986) and others about the ways traditionally masculine and feminine roles in the domestic sphere construct television consumption; I wanted a couple with children because of the research indicating that the household-maintenance roles of women and men, even if “egalitarian” before children, move to a more traditional division-of-labor after children are introduced—with women spending more time on childcare and chores (American Time Use Survey, 2011). I also, of course, needed to find a family that would be willing to allow me to pry into their lives through extensive interviews over the period of a single year.

The household unit. The family I asked (and who agreed) is a multi-racial couple with an 8-year-old son and 6-year-old daughter living on the outskirts of Atlanta. I have known both the husband (“Rick,” a white, 37-year-old) and wife (“Nancy,” a 35-year-old African American) since before they were married in 2001, meeting them through a church we once both attended. (I have since moved to another region of the United States.) Rick works as a high school administrator and coach; Nancy does not have a job outside the home but does freelance work as a transcriptionist and publications designer. They own a home and two cars; their household income at the time of my study was slightly below the household median (\$50,964) in the United States in 2012 (Fletcher, 2012). One cost-cutting decision by the family has been to forgo monthly cable or satellite service; they watch broadcast channels (ABC, NBC, CBS, and Fox, along with public television) through over-the-air reception. Rick and Nancy do pay for high-speed Internet and subscribe to Netflix, which streams programming to a large television set in the living room. Another television is in the master bedroom upstairs. An office with computer, used by both Rick and Nancy, is downstairs just off the living room. Rick and Nancy may be seen as part of a trend covered in major media outlets during 2012: households opting out of cable or satellite service and using a combination of over-the-air

TV and high-speed Internet to save money (Stewart, 2012). Around 5 million U.S. households had “cut the cord” in late 2011. This means, however, that Rick and Nancy’s household is without access to “SportsCenter” and other ESPN programming on the household television. Rick and Nancy also do own cellphones, but not “smartphones.”

Data collection. I asked Rick and Nancy to participate in this project by agreeing to be interviewed every few months by Skype and allowing those interviews to be recorded and transcribed; I also asked if they would be willing to log their sports viewing each week so we could discuss it in our interviews. I did not request a high level of detail in the entries, only the type of sport being watched, the length of viewing, and what family members were involved. They agreed to do this, and I sometimes used the viewing diary as a prompt for discussion in our interviews.

After I secured their participation, I reviewed their initial log entries and interviewed them in person for about 90 minutes, at their kitchen table, during Super Bowl weekend in early February. I then watched the Super Bowl with Rick, Nancy, and other extended family members who came to the house to watch. The remainder of my interviews during the year were via Skype, where Rick and Nancy would sit in front of their computer, occasionally joined by their children, to talk about their sports consumption and how it fitted into their household and lives. During the interviews, I began with a “grand tour question,” which was to ask, in general terms, about what sports news Rick and Nancy had been following or events they remember watching since we last talked (McCracken, 1988). Based on their answer, I followed up with more specific questions, sometimes referring to their log as a prompt for discussion. I would clarify (“So, are you saying ...?”) when I wasn’t sure I understood a point either was making.

I interviewed them by Skype four times during the year, each time for around an hour. They gave me the diary toward the end of 2012, and I reviewed it in light of the interview feedback. After I arrived at my general conclusions, I shared those with Rick and Nancy during a final “debriefing” interview toward the end of the study.

I should make it clear that I approached this entire project—as I do all of my work—from a feminist perspective, with the performance of gender roles and their impact on freedom (for men and women) as a central concern. A number of highly influential audience/reception studies have been undertaken by feminist researchers with the same general concerns although looking at different content; in fact, feminist scholarship is seen as key for the development of reception analysis in the United States (Hermes, 2006). I use the term “feminist” here in the sense Hargreaves (1994) did when she coined the term “sports feminism” to capture the movement, which sprang up and grew alongside second-wave feminism, to address gender discrimination in sport. Hargreaves described

sports feminism as activism springing from the understanding that practices around sport generally subordinate women; thus, it is the work of sports feminists to challenge these practices. I work from the premise that the *mediation of sport and the practices around its consumption* marginalize women, narrowing their opportunities to participate as fully accepted fans/spectators. I also operate from the premise that "ordinary, routine, run-of-the-mill activities that take place inside homes every day bear an uncanny resemblance to the social structure" (Walker, 1996, p. 813). Thus, my questions and my analysis of the interview material and viewing diary were drafted in that light. For the purposes of this study, I did not integrate an "intersectional" approach that would have more purposefully considered the ways class and race influenced leisure time and gendered sports consumption in the household, and I recognize this decision as one that influenced (and limited) my data collection and analysis.

Considering Sports and Television in the Household

Rick and Nancy both identify as sports fans. Both played sports extensively (in clubs, intramural, and recreation leagues) through their high school and college years; Rick played basketball, and Nancy played basketball, volleyball, and ran track. Both believe sports participation and consumption are an important part of their domestic life; they follow the men's professional sports teams in Atlanta (baseball, basketball, and football) and the men's professional sports teams in Chicago, where Rick was born and spent part of his childhood. ("I guess I'm one of those people who only likes a team because my boyfriend did ... but at least I stick with it," Nancy joked.) Their garage is a makeshift shrine to the Chicago Bulls (NBA), complete with a wall of pictures and emblems of the team. It also has memorabilia dedicated to the Chicago Bears (NFL) and Chicago Cubs (MLB). "We'll also cheer for the Falcons because we live in Atlanta," Rick told me in our first interview. "We also cheer for the Braves [Atlanta's MLB team], and we cheer for the Falcons [NBA]. It's loyalty."

However, Rick and Nancy's *motives* for following these teams, the *way* they follow them, and *how* the spend time doing so is quite different. The way sports consumption fits into the collective lives of this family is built around the interests and schedule of the male head of household (Rick), with relatively few exceptions.

Why Watch? Motives for Viewing

Rick and Nancy both asserted that they saw following sports as important for the family. They shared a strong belief—perhaps predicated on their own participation—that sports are valuable for learning values and life lessons and that some of those lessons can be learned by watching athletes, whom Rick

strongly argued should be seen as "role models." They also both believed that following teams was a way to stay connected to friends and family who are also fans and to express loyalty to their community.

For Rick, consuming mediated sports were also about having an outlet for his "competitive" nature and about remembering his own playing days in high school and college. He also saw consuming sports as an important part of his well-earned leisure time after putting in a 50-to-60 hour week at work. Sports were, in fact, central: "Sports make the world go around," he said, adding that following teams and athletes is part of a healthy life "because it makes you happy."

Nancy never put watching sports in terms relating to leisure. Instead, she often expressed a belief that the importance she attached to following sports teams was predicated by Rick's interest. In other words, she kept up with teams—including by occasionally going online and reading about players; kept abreast of the television schedule; found streaming videos of games that wouldn't be on over-the-air networks; made sure she was "in the room" with Rick when his favorite teams were playing—at least some of the time; and generally supported certain teams because she saw these things as important to her husband. More than once, she used the phrase, "It makes him happy," to describe the reason for her sports-related activities; she also said she used Internet aggregation tools (such as Mashup) to follow Rick's favorite teams because "I like to be the one to bring him the news ... I don't want to be a stupid wife about sports."

Nancy also indicated that she sometimes expressed an interest in sports to set an example for the children. "I like to encourage them to be interested in sports more than they are," she said, which meant sometimes watching a sporting event on TV so her son and daughter would notice her interest. She saw their interest in watching as important to developing an interest in participating, which she believed could provide opportunities for them that they might not otherwise have. Nancy also noted that the children had "caught on" to their father's interest in sports. They would sometimes find a sporting event as they flipped through the channels and linger on it "because Daddy likes it."

Rituals Around Viewing

The log and interviews both reveal a pattern of practices and rituals around sports viewing in the household. Generally, the practice was one that allowed Rick to put his full attention on the televised event.

Planning the schedule for game/event viewing often happened days in advance, and was facilitated by Nancy, who kept up with the game schedules of favorite teams (such as the Cubs or Bears) and with the television schedule. For some games that would not be available on the broadcast channels they received, she would hunt online to find out whether the game would be streamed—and sometimes they were.

Rick would plan his weekend viewing to minimize distractions during the event. This involved taking care of any household or childcare duties to which he was committed for the day, then making sure he had prepared meals or snacks to eat while he was in front of the TV. He sometimes plays a sports-themed video game during commercials in front of the television, oftentimes with his son.

Rick said this focused attention on televised sports events is an important part of his downtime away from work. Sometimes, if neither team playing is one of his favorites, he will grade papers as he watches. Otherwise, "it's me and the game ... If it's a Chicago game, no work, period." He keeps his cell phone with him during some games to text message a small circle of friends and family about what is unfolding on screen.

Occasionally, he sits in front of the computer in the family's home office to watch a live-streamed game. He said he does not enjoy it as much: he is less comfortable; he needs to stay more focused on the computer screen (which is less than half the size of the television screen); and he added, "I can't get up and pace" off his nervous energy at a critical point during the game. Sometimes he will go to his nearby brother's house to watch a big game on cable TV; on rare occasions, he will meet a small circle of friends at a sports bar to catch a cable-only event. (Rick often lamented the inconvenience of not having cable access during our interviews.)

Rick said he is glad when Nancy and the children show an interest in the games he watches. For instance, during the NCAA "March Madness" annual basketball tournament, he brought blank brackets (for the men's tournament only) home for Nancy and the children to fill out. None did, and Rick was clearly disappointed. "I was really excited that [Nancy] would watch the games with me" if she filled out a bracket. He added: "Wives, when they have a bracket, they get more into it." He also often tries to get her to watch replays he thinks are exciting, with varied success. "She doesn't care to see it," he said.

Generally, Nancy rarely sits down for long periods during a sports broadcast; when she does, she brings either a task (such as laundry to fold) or a word game such as a crossword puzzle to complete. Often, she and Rick told me, she is supervising the children or working in the home office. When I ask her, across several interviews, why she does not sit down with Rick for more than a few minutes or why the sports event does not hold her sole attention, her replies are always a variation on the same theme: She has other work to do or she simply does not want to dedicate the leisure time she does have to the televised event. For instance, during one interview, about watching NFL football, she said, "It's hours at a time. I just can't sit that long." During another interview, she said, "I can't sit down and do anything. I probably have adult ADD ... I never have *just* leisure time. I have too much other stuff to do."

The single exception to Nancy's general approach to sports consumption seemed to be the Olympics. During our post-Olympics interview, she was

animated and detailed as she talked about the events and athletes, and she had clearly spent a lot of time watching. She added that she was relieved when the Games were over because the family was staying up until midnight every night to watch.

Watching television (on the set or in streaming video format on the computer) is the primary sports-consumption activity for Rick, but not the only one. Another ritual is to leave early for work each day and then to check scores and news on his computer as soon as he arrives. He can also update his fantasy sports activity. He also occasionally emails friends and family about the events and news of interest. Nancy also spends time at the computer on sports—but in looking for news of interest to Rick and at the television schedule. She pays special attention to schedules for the Chicago baseball team, the Cubs. When the team wins, she hoists a team flag that she bought for Rick in front of the house. "I feel it's my responsibility," she said.

Sports and Domestic Responsibilities

The family's routines around sports viewing necessarily involved some negotiation around domestic and childcare duties. Although the couple did not dispute the fact that Nancy generally had responsibility for the children while Rick watched sports on the weekend, it was clear that Nancy felt that arrangement had some "give" to it, and that Rick was willing to contribute to the household. One way he did so was by carefully choosing the games he planned to watch—and deciding whether he might even just watch the second half so he could play with the children during the first half.

I earlier described Nancy's motivation to make Rick "happy" by tuning in; Rick occasionally used similar expressions about Nancy for reasons he tuned *out*. During one interview, he said he looks for at least a "three-hour block" he can give to Nancy and the children. He has also decided to forgo watching college football. (He and Nancy graduated from a small, liberal-arts college without a football team—so neither has an affinity for any team.) "I got a family, and my wife hates watching football everyday [during the weekend]," he said. "I let her have a football breather every Saturday." He added that on Sundays, if he has watched all afternoon, he oftentimes will choose not to watch the Sunday-night game on NBC.

Generally, Rick and Nancy seemed to be on the "same page" about their negotiation of his time each weekend. Rick talked at length, across interviews, about the care he took to decide, each week, how he would navigate time with Nancy (who liked to watch movies with Rick); his children; and the television. Both Rick and Nancy seemed to understand and honor this negotiation; an example was a Saturday-morning family outing for eye exams that dragged on longer than expected. Rick admitted he was "worried" about not getting back

home in time for a basketball game he wanted to watch, and Nancy said she was keeping an eye on the clock so she could do her part to make sure he saw the game.

Only at one point in the hours of joint interviews did Rick and Nancy argue, and that was when Nancy raised her disappointment about what she saw as the time Rick was missing with his children to watch sport on the weekends. She brought up an instance where Rick had promised that he would teach his daughter how to ride her bike without training wheels. He delayed going outside because he was watching a game, and Nancy and the children had already accomplished the task by the time he did. "That kind of thing will happen where kids will ask him to do something," Nancy said, clearly bothered. "We have to share him with football. He works late on weeknights, and the weekends are all the kids have." Rick responded with the fact that he *had* made it outside—and not long after he had promised. He added: "I enjoy sports, and I rarely get any 'me' time in my life."

Watching Women's Sports

Each interview, I asked Rick and Nancy about their encounters with women's sports. For instance, in our first interview, when they ticked off the names of the Atlanta and Chicago teams they followed, I asked about the Atlanta Dream and the Chicago Sky, WNBA teams in each city. Rick told me that he had "not thought" about those teams—and they did not come up in subsequent interviews. Nancy said she was not interested in the WNBA; she did not see those teams as "representing" their hometowns. "I have no reason to feel connected to the teams," she added.

This is not to say that Rick—and, to a lesser degree, Nancy—did not express an interest in women's sports. During the NCAA basketball tournament ("March Madness"), Rick would check scores for the women's games on his computer at work. He also occasionally watched game clips online. Overall, however, women's sports were not a presence; their viewing log for the entire year showed just one women's event outside the Olympics—a college game involving the top-ranked University of Connecticut Huskies. Rick blamed the lack of viewing time mostly on the fact that many women's sports events are aired only on cable television; although he could sit at his computer and watch, he was not inclined to do so.

Rick, Nancy, and their children did watch women compete in the Olympics, in such events as gymnastics and beach volleyball, which were aired on NBC's over-the-air network. They thought that NBC gave ample coverage to female athletes and that the coverage was appropriate. Nancy said, "It's America, and we're trying to be dominant ... it doesn't matter who."

Discussion and Conclusions

As I explored how the work of Morley (1986) and others might apply to my research project, I was struck—40 years after Title IX, in an era where the use of digital technologies has become commonplace, and where cultural ideas about the family and domestic roles have shifted in the past 20 years—by how much has *not* changed, at least in the dynamics of this particular family around sports on the TV set, as I might have expected. Morley's observation about "characteristics of the domestic roles of masculinity and femininity" (p. 152) as a *driving force* in the role of television in the home seemed to be key to understanding the dynamics for Rick and Nancy's lives around mediated sports. Indeed, Rick, who spent most of his waking hours at the high school where he worked, viewed his time in the home, remote in hand, as well-earned and readily-enjoyed leisure time. For Nancy, sports consumption seemed to be almost all work and little fun. It appeared to be emotion labor. In other words: his consumption aligned with our understanding of the roles and rituals of *fandom* while hers aligned far more with cultural understandings of the roles and rituals around being a *wife and mother*.

If additional research (which I will discuss below) finds that this idea is transferable across other types of family units, there are certainly powerful implications for the ways sports programmers, marketers, and leagues should think about building audiences, especially female audiences, around their products. It also has implications for the work of women's sports advocates, feminist scholars, and cultural scholars around sport. First, it would imply that addressing the issues around consumption of women's sports cannot be simplified to a "build it and they will come" approach because of its failure to recognize the impediments to women (or men) tuning in, even if the content is available. Second, it would suggest that we need to spend more time exploring the thorny issue of the "reinforcing loop" around culture, gender, and sport: *sports content*, for the most part, reinforcing traditional roles of masculinity and femininity—and *practices around consumption* reinforcing the values evident in the *content*. Thus, openings for challenges to content and to cultural practice become difficult to find and sustain.

Women's Sports Consumption

My conversations and observations about this single family over a one-year time frame have underscored the hurdles that the enterprise of women's spectator sports face in audience building. Women's sports advocates have bemoaned the fact that women have not chosen to consume women's sports in great numbers, even 40 years after Title IX; what we must understand are the impediments to women making this choice. They are certainly *cultural* in the sense that because sport has been largely defined as masculine, watching female athletes compete is

not an exercise in gender socialization for women but instead challenges norms even 40 years after Title IX. These sports events, then, may not be seen as a leisure activity for women who are looking for comfortable options as they surf the channels.

But the impediments are also *structural* and involve factors such as access to the remote on a night or weekend when a men's sports event is also on television (and that would be almost every night and weekend); the division of labor around childcare and domestic duties in the home; and, access to cable or satellite service. The fact that Rick and Nancy—like millions of Americans—do not have access to cable or satellite made it abundantly clear to me how difficult it is to access women's sports via over-the-air broadcast. It is true that women's sports are much easier to find on television now than ever before (Voepel, 2012); what is also true, however, is that they are featured on networks available only by subscription. Occasionally, Rick (not Nancy—a relevant observation) would mention his interest in a women's sporting event such as the NCAA basketball tournament, but his lack of access to it.

Another factor, in my observation, is the family structure and its "life cycle"; for instance, the ages and gender of children. I am not convinced that consumption of men's sports is as much of a "dependent variable" on household composition as that of women's sports might be. But, as I interviewed Nancy and Rick while their children played behind them, I could not help but wonder whether the conversation around women's sports might be different in a few years, when their daughter will likely be far more active in competitive sports than she was during this year of observation.

Where Next

This project, while illuminating, has mostly been instructive in raising new questions and pointing out the ways a larger, more comprehensive project should be designed. I have already mentioned the limits imposed by the type of family I chose: a relatively traditional one but not necessarily representative (case in point: about six in 10 U.S. women work outside the home today, according to the Pew Research Center. Nancy did freelance work at home.). A study that incorporated unmarried women and men; gay and lesbian households; and single-parent households, for instance, would provide a much more representative, "transferable" understanding of the relationship between the household and sports consumption; so would the incorporation of more racial and ethnic diversity, such as a Latino/a household.

Another limitation of this project should also be addressed in the design of a larger study. I asked Rick and Nancy to log their media consumption related to sports; my interviews with them were also focused solely on sports consumption (although other media consumption came up tangentially). What I missed in

this approach was ability to meaningfully situate the role of sports within the wider context of leisure activities and media use for this family. This should have been apparent to me, as Morley (1986) wrote about the idea the TV must be viewed in light of the entire picture around leisure in a household unit. That added dimension is essential for a broader study that explores the relationship between cultural power, domestic leisure, and the consumption of mediated sports in the household.

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