

# On the Sidelines: Roles and Responsibilities of the Diamond Dolls in Intercollegiate Baseball

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## Abstract

*The purpose of this article is to examine the roles that women play in the Diamond Dolls organization and the meaning and significance of those (gendered) roles in the university and athletic setting. Specifically, I am concerned with the ways in which institutions construct and maintain hegemonic femininity (Choi, 2000; Krane, 2001). Employing a feminist approach, I critically explored the use of sexist language in the naming of a student organization, the roles and responsibilities of the Diamond Dolls, and the meaning of these roles within the context of intercollegiate sport. Lastly, the role that gender norms play in women's participation in such organizations is also addressed.*

I am faculty in health and kinesiology at Sam Houston State University, and in one of my undergraduate courses (Contemporary Issues in Sport) I asked my students to reflect on a personal experience in sport or physical activity—involving themselves or someone they knew—in which they were pressured to conform to a rigid gender stereotype. Students were asked to critically reflect on this experience, attempting to connect their personal experience to some of the theoretical perspectives discussed in class. For example, several female students wrote about being discouraged from participating in sports deemed *inappropriate* for young girls (e.g., football, wrestling) and the effect this experience had on their social and psychological development. This assignment was part of the *gender and identity* segment of the course.

In his reaction paper, a male student in the course and former member of the university baseball team, raised concern regarding the Diamond Dolls organization, which he described as “a group of girls who help the baseball team during the games.” He suggested that their primary function was to “retrieve loose bats and

balls during home games.” He further indicated that the women were “encouraged to wear short shorts and tight baseball shirts” and to “smile to the crowd as they dutifully perform their tasks in front of the admiring fans and players that are seated in the dugout.”

In his critique of the Diamond Dolls, he suggested that the “girls are pressured to conform to a rigid gender stereotype of ‘pretty girls helping guys during the pursuit of sport.’” He also noted the significance of their “sideline” role in men’s sport stating, “the manly athletes are on the field while the pretty girls support them from the sidelines.”

While this student recognized the gender stereotypes associated with such an organization, he also questioned *why* the women would “choose” to participate. He suggested that “they must get something out of this or they wouldn’t do it.” In reading his two-page reaction paper, I was immediately struck by the existence of such an organization, especially within a university setting. As I

had very little knowledge of baseball culture, I began to research the existence of such organizations across the United States.

I initially approached several colleagues in my department who were familiar with baseball culture. One colleague indicated that this was a common organization associated with baseball and that the women who fulfilled these roles went beyond picking up loose bats and balls. I also emailed colleagues at other institutions across the United States to inquire whether this was a standard aspect of collegiate baseball. While none were aware of such an organization at their respective institution, one male colleague, a former university distance runner in the Southeast, described the “Trackettes.” The Trackettes were responsible for providing the *male* track athletes with good luck packages (e.g., powerbars, candy) the day before a meet.

I then turned to the Internet and in a Google search of “Diamond Dolls and baseball” I found that hundreds of universities and high schools sponsored similar organizations. In reviewing the various organizations, it was clear that almost all of them were at institutions in the Southern United States. While most Diamond Dolls organizations were linked to their respective baseball team’s web site, some were linked under student activities and organizations. The amount of information available about each Diamond Dolls organization varied. Sites generally included photographs (headshots) of the women, a brief description of the club’s purpose, the women’s roles, and the admission requirements.

Up until this time, my understanding was that the women’s sole responsibility was as “bat girl” (another common term used to describe the women and their role). Although the roles of the Diamond Dolls vary at each institution, the responsibilities usually include selling programs; retrieving loose bats, balls and helmets; ushering fans; and making scrapbooks for players (see Table 1).

In addition to understanding the various responsibilities of the Diamond Dolls, I was also interested in understanding the admission requirements. Table 2 lists the various admission standards (e.g., poise, appearance, academic standing, knowledge of and interest in baseball).

**Table 1**  
**Roles and Responsibilities of the Diamond Dolls**

- Encouraging team spirit
- Community service
- Serving as “bat girls”—recovering foul balls and retrieving bats and helmets at home games
- Fundraising (car washes, t-shirt sales, alumni games, etc.)
- Hosting team banquets
- Managing the concession stand
- Assisting in the press box
- Managing ticket sales
- Ushering fans at home games
- Supporting the team and individual athletes (making scrapbooks and treats for their assigned athlete)
- Hosting recruits (campus tours, entertaining them in dining halls)
- Assisting with baseball camps
- Selling programs
- Checking on umpires (hydrated, delivering balls) and coaches
- Game-day giveaways
- Answering fans’ questions
- Videotaping pitchers

## Feminist Theory

Feminism, “a movement to end sexist oppression” (hooks, 1984, p. 17), places the female experience at the center of inquiry. Beyond simply studying women’s experiences, feminist theory acknowledges the marginalized and oppressed status of women in society (and sport) and how dominant paradigms of power influence and constrain individuals (Hall, 1996; hooks, 1984; Whaley, 2001). As Messner and Sabo (1990) noted, “gender stereotypes are scrutinized and their influences on socialization are evaluated” (p. 1-2) in using a feminist approach. Moreover, as Hall (1996) noted, much feminist writing and research centers on the study of relations between the sexes, specifically the experiences of women in relation to men.

In this paper, I utilize feminist theory to examine the roles and responsibilities of women in the Diamond Dolls organization and the meaning and significance of these (gendered) roles within the university setting. Specifically, I am concerned with the ways in which universities (and athletic departments) serve to construct and maintain hegemonic femininity (Choi, 2000; Krane, 2001) by emphasizing a dominant notion of woman-

hood. It is important to note that while I mainly discuss the Diamond Dolls organization, this paper does not focus exclusively on one organization (or institution).

## Sexist Language and the Naming of a Student Organization

An organization’s name plays an important role in connecting its members among one another and also in separating its members from other groups. Names or nicknames provide attributes that define an organization and in many ways are considered an important part of a group’s identity. These names are also often a way in which to mark a group relative to its gender, commonly referred to as gender marking (Messner, Duncan, & Jensen, 1993).

The use of “doll” and “girl” (bat girl) to describe a woman is an especially demeaning and patronizing term. A doll is a child’s toy or collector’s item. It is an inanimate *object* that is often valued for its beauty and perfection. For example the Barbie doll, an icon that many argue is representative of a culture that objectifies and stereotypes the image of womanhood (Gilman, 2000), has been the object of much criticism throughout the years. Such infantilization, as Messner et al. (1993) argued, is a further example of how women are devalued within society in general and in the sport community in particular. Within the sport context, the gender marking of team names has been well documented (Duncan & Messner, 1998; Messner et al., 1993). Male athletes are almost always referred to as “men” or “young men,” whereas female athletes are frequently called “girls” and other “feminine” terms (e.g., ladies, darlings, dolls, belles). The use of such monikers serves to devalue and discredit the female members of such organizations and their roles and responsibilities (Duncan & Messner, 1998; Messner et al., 1993).

Committed to the fair treatment of all individuals, many universities and colleges have adopted nonsexist language policies that discourage sexist language. Language is deemed sexist if it discriminates another’s sex, reinforces the idea of one sex’s superiority, or perpetuates sex and gender stereotypes (Cameron, 1998; Miller & Swift, 2001). To label a university-sponsored student organization using such terminology severely

## Table 2

### Admission Requirements

- Appearance
- Poise and personality
- Ability to meet and work with people easily
- Desire to work in a service capacity
- Résumé
- Interview
- Discipline file check
- Personal qualifications
- Grade check (some specify a required grade point average)
- Ability to provide a scrapbook and treats for an assigned player
- Participation at club meetings and fundraisers
- Ability to attend all games
- Answering fans’ questions
- Knowledge of (and enthusiasm for) baseball
- Sincere interest in becoming a Diamond Doll

trivializes, demeans, and dismisses an already marginalized group, and serves to maintain the dominant status of those in power (Cameron, 1998). While it may be argued that such labeling was not purposeful, its continued use perpetuates and supports existing gender inequities and stereotypes (i.e., woman as object, woman as infant, woman as submissive; Krane, 2001).

## Roles and Responsibilities

As previously noted, the responsibilities of the Diamond Dolls organization vary across institutions. In general, however, their primary function is to *support* and *encourage* the baseball program in a variety of capacities (see Table 1). To support and encourage the baseball program, members of the Diamond Dolls organization are responsible for taking care of (e.g., making scrapbooks or treats for players, tending to the concession stand, ushering fans) and picking up after (bats, balls, helmets) the male athletes, coaching staff, umpires, and fans—most of whom are male.

Historically, rigid gender norms have aligned “women’s work” with domestic responsibilities (e.g., cleaning, laundry, food preparation, caring for children and husbands). However, during the liberation movement of the 1960s, the passage of antidiscrimination laws redefined the roles of women (and men) and challenged societal beliefs that “a woman’s place is in the home.” Despite the many advances in educational and career opportunities for girls and women and the increased number of women working outside the home, attitudes toward gender roles have been much slower to change (Bryant, 2003). The perception of woman as “caretaker, homemaker, and mother” is a social construct embedded within our culture. Women have been—and continue to be—socialized as the core figures in the maintenance of domestic and caretaking responsibilities, which many still consider to be “naturally feminine” roles. Distinguishing between a “female sex role” and “male sex role” normalizes and legitimizes dominant forms of femininity and masculinity while marginalizing others, and it further ignores the extent to which gender is a dynamic, relational process (Baber & Tucker, 2006; Hall, 1996).

Even within the sport context, the place for women

has been “seen as on the sidelines engaged in supportive activities which should not be taken too seriously by the sport community” (Davis, 1994, p. 151). In her research examining the representation(s) of gender within the sport of cheerleading, Davis (1990, 1994) suggested that cheerleaders not only provide a supportive role within men’s sport, but also “provide flashy and/or sexy entertainment for the crowd” (Davis, 1994, p. 149). Since the mid 1940s, cheerleading has been dominated by females and is often considered to be a “naturally feminine activity” (Davis, 1990, p. 153). Like most sports, the public has a gendered view of cheerleading that is fueled by stereotypical assumptions regarding women’s role and place in sport. Similarly, many of the expectations of women within the Diamond Dolls organization serve to maintain similar notions of “gender-appropriate” behavior.

While the college experience has been found to liberalize students’ gender-role attitudes (Bryant, 2003), the responsibilities of the Diamond Dolls further perpetuate antiquated societal beliefs pertaining to women’s place in society and sport, and in particular women’s role in relation to men (to support and serve). While the mission of each university differs, many would argue that the purpose of higher education is to promote intellectual, personal, and social growth, while also promoting and supporting diversity and equitable opportunities for all students. Although it is beyond the scope of this paper, it is important to consider the role that institutions play in promoting and supporting such a mission. For example, the visiting football locker room at the University of Iowa was painted pink in the 1970s. It was originally suggested that the use of pink was meant to soothe and calm the opponent. After a recent renovation to the stadium, the visitors’ locker room now includes pink walls, lockers, carpet, urinals, and showers. In 2005, a visiting law professor argued that the use of pink (a stereotypical color representing femininity and women) promoted and perpetuated offensive stereotypes about women and homosexuality and as a result placed the university in the position of supporting those messages (Curtis, 2005).

Members of the Diamond Dolls organization are also responsible for serving as hostesses at home games and during on-campus recruiting visits. At home games the



women assist in ushering fans to their seats and answering fans' questions pertaining to the game. During recruiting visits, members of the Diamond Dolls organization are asked to provide campus tours, answer recruits' questions, and serve as a source of information for recruits' parents. While the Diamond Dolls organization focuses on baseball recruits, many universities use hostesses for other major men's sports (e.g., football, basketball), particularly universities with "big-time" sport programs. In 2001, a female hostess at the University of Colorado (CU) was allegedly gang raped by members of the CU football team and several recruits during a team recruiting party (Watson, 2002). No charges were filed, however the case brought national attention and criticism to the use of recruiting hostesses. While no research has specifically examined hostesses' experiences or critically explored their role within the intercollegiate sport structure, sport journalists have questioned the potentially dangerous aspects of such groups.

In an article examining the risky behaviors associated with collegiate recruiting, Watson (2002), a sport journalist suggested that hostesses are "typically attractive college co-eds whose goal is to help lure [recruits]...with parties, underage drinking, and sex...to their respective universities" (Watson, 2002). Denied by programs that use such groups, many have argued that hostesses are expected to "do whatever you can to get [the recruit] to come [to their respective university]." While Watson noted the sexist—and I would include heterosexual—aspects of such groups, the majority of attention has been directed toward the dangers that recruits face and the potential problems that may develop for an athletic department. Little attention has been given to the sexist and heterosexual nature of such organizations and the potential for sexual harassment and abuse that female hostesses face.

It is no surprise that hostesses are almost always exclusively female. While some advocates for such groups have argued that women are "just more interested" or are more often "looking for public relations-type positions" (Watson, 2002), critics are quick to challenge the overt sexism associated with the all-female membership. Alternative options could include the use of university professors, administrators, or local officials rather than female students.

Several of the responsibilities of the Diamond Dolls fall into the category of "public relations" and "marketing/management." For example, at numerous institutions the women are responsible for ticket and program sales, fundraising, and community service. While such duties have the potential to provide women with educational and professional experiences in public relations and sales or marketing, a critical question must initially be answered: why are only women eligible to acquire such experiences? One could argue that both women and men, especially those pursuing a degree in sport management and marketing, could benefit from such an experience.

The female-only admission requirement (at most institutions) is a direct example of the use of sex to sell and promote a product. University baseball programs that sponsor and support such organizations are using female students as a way to boost ticket and program sales, entice fans, and increase funds through their various fundraising and community service efforts (local car washes, alumni dinner, etc.). Consistent with the use of cheerleaders as "flashy and/or sexy entertainment for the crowd," (Davis, 1994, p. 151), members of the Diamond Dolls also have the potential to "[become] the male spectator's sex symbol" (Davis, 1994, p. 151). This is particularly evident in that appearance, poise, and personality are included as standards for admission to the Diamond Dolls organization (see Table 2). Certainly the use of sex appeal is nothing new within the world of marketing and sales (or sport), but its use and promotion within the university context must be questioned.

It is also important to critically address the heterosexual assumptions inherent within the all-female membership. Research has documented the heterosexual climate of various sport settings (Anderson, 2002; Pronger, 1990). For males, participation in sport is perceived as a way to validate heterosexuality. As Anderson (2002) stated, "sports have been described as a place in which hegemonic masculinity is reproduced and defined, as an athlete represents the ideal of what it means to be a man" (p. 860). Research addressing the homophobic and heterosexual nature of sport has also consistently noted the especially hostile and homophobic atmosphere of men's mainstream team sports (e.g., basket-

ball, baseball, football, and hockey; Anderson, 2002; Curry, 1991, 1998). Given the culture of men's sport, the all-female membership of the Diamond Dolls organization clearly works to uphold "traditional" ideals pertaining to masculinity and heterosexuality, affirming the players' heterosexuality and reinforcing the assumption that men are "naturally" attracted to females.

## The Status of Women and Girls in Sport

It is also important to examine the existence of the Diamond Dolls organization within the context of intercollegiate sport. As noted, members of the Diamond Dolls organization support and encourage *men's* sport. No comparative organization exists for women's sport programs. Such neglect is important to question considering the status of women's sport within the U.S. intercollegiate context.

While women and girls' opportunities in sport have significantly increased since the passage of Title IX in 1972, women and girls continue to confront a number of barriers that restrict their sport participation and overall experiences in sport. In their longitudinal study of women in intercollegiate sport, Acosta and Carpenter (2008) reported that women have less than 42% of all athletic participation opportunities, 42% of all scholarship dollars, 36% of sport budgets, and 32% of recruiting budgets. Moreover, researchers have urged caution when predicting the future trends of women's sport participation patterns (Coakley, 2007). Specifically, the underrepresentation of women in decision-making positions (i.e., coaching, administration), the trivialization of women's sports, lack of media representation, continued emphasis on cosmetic fitness, and budget cutbacks all play a role in preventing further progress (Coakley, 2007).

Despite distinct disparities between women's and men's sport, the Diamond Dolls are a university-sponsored organization working to assist men's sport programs and not women's. Title IX, the law prohibiting gender discrimination in federally funded institutions, indicates that publicity services (e.g., band, cheerleaders, pep squads) that are provided for men's athletic events must also be provided for women's athletic events

(Lopiano, 2005). While liberal feminists would argue for the need to "provide girls and women with the same opportunities and resources as boys and men" (Hall, 1996, p. 91), a radical feminist framework would call for a questioning of the "fundamental nature of sport" (Hall, 1996, p. 91). Radical feminism advocates the destruction and transformation of patriarchal ideologies that restrict women's experiences and representation in sport. A critical examination of the *extra* support and publicity provided to men's sport programs is needed.

## Choice?

Sharply defined gender roles dictate what is "acceptable" and subsequently "unacceptable" for each sex. These roles are distinguished and enforced through the process of socialization. Mass media, government, church, sport, school, peers, and family all play a role in influencing one's social development. Socialization is, however, an ongoing, interactive process in which females and males are continually monitored. Those who stray too far to the "other side" are deemed "deviant" and "abnormal" and are most often ridiculed for their "inappropriate" behavior. Subsequently, those who cling tightly to socially accepted gender roles are rewarded for displaying *appropriate* behavior (Baber & Tucker, 2006).

It is important to note that I have not interviewed any members of the Diamond Dolls organization about their personal and/or professional reasons for participating in such an organization. Future research is needed to not only explore female students' reasons for participating in such an organization, but also their experiences and perceptions. However, the fact that female students volunteer to participate in such an organization may be used as "proof" (by universities) that such an organization is, in fact, not sexist.

It is possible to suggest that members of the Diamond Dolls organization are rewarded by various social institutions for aligning with the traditional model of womanhood. Researchers have found that women often uncritically adopt such roles in society, not only as a way in which to be accepted, but also because they have not been presented with alternatives (Baber & Tucker, 2006). Moreover, the social pressure

to conform to the traditional model of womanhood is still difficult to resist. Also, a consideration of geographic location is necessary, since the majority of these organizations are affiliated with institutions in the Southern United States. Researchers have suggested that those residing in the Southern United States tend to hold more traditionally conservative ideas pertaining to gender roles (Goodwyn Jones, 1989).

## Conclusion

My purpose in writing this paper was to critically examine the roles and responsibilities in the Diamond Dolls organization and the meaning and significance of these roles within the university and athletic context. It is important to note that I am in no way condemning the women who participate in such organizations across the United States. The problem is not that there are

women who conform to a culturally imposed expectation of "womanhood," but that such expectations exist, even in an institution of higher education. Furthermore, I strongly believe in the importance of building positive environments for women on campus, as well as social structures that foster friendships and a sense of community among women. In fact, I would argue that there is a need to further develop healthy, growth-fostering alternatives for college women (see Miller, 1987 for further discussion).

Lastly, wider exposure to alternative discourses is necessary if we are to change social attitudes. Organizations that reflect a model of traditional womanhood need to give way to communities that better reflect the reality of modern women's lives. Greater attention also needs to be given to the roles and responsibilities of women and girls within men's sport and the messages and meanings attached to such roles. ■

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