December 2018

“Everyone Wants That Ring, and I Have It”: A Content Analysis of Identity Expressions from Female Castmembers on the Reality Television Series Wags (Wives and Girlfriends of Sports Stars)

Kaitlyn Millican
georiagirl0816@gmail.com

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalscholarship.unlv.edu/thesesdissertations

Part of the Communication Commons

Repository Citation
https://digitalscholarship.unlv.edu/thesesdissertations/3292

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Scholarship@UNLV. It has been accepted for inclusion in UNLV Theses, Dissertations, Professional Papers, and Capstones by an authorized administrator of Digital Scholarship@UNLV. For more information, please contact digitalscholarship@unlv.edu.
“EVERYONE WANTS THAT RING, AND I HAVE IT”: A CONTENT ANALYSIS OF IDENTITY EXPRESSIONS FROM FEMALE CASTMEMBERS ON THE REALITY TELEVISION SERIES WAGs (WIVES AND GIRLFRIENDS OF SPORTS STARS)

By
Kaitlyn M. Millican

Bachelor of Arts-Communication Studies
University of Nevada, Las Vegas
May 2016

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

Master of Arts-Communication Studies

Department of Communication Studies
Greenspun College of Urban Affairs
The Graduate College

University of Nevada, Las Vegas
May 2018
Copyright by Kaitlyn Millican, 2018
All Rights Reserved
This thesis prepared by

Kaitlyn M. Millican

entitled

“Everyone Wants That Ring, And I Have It”: A Content Analysis Of Identity Expressions From Female Castmembers On The Reality Television Series Wags (Wives And Girlfriends Of Sports Stars)

is approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts-Communication Studies
Department of Communication Studies

Tara Emmers-Sommer, Ph.D.
Examination Committee Chair

Jennifer Guthrie, Ph.D.
Examination Committee Member

Erika Engstrom, Ph.D.
Examination Committee Member

David Dickens, Ph.D.
Graduate College Faculty Representative

Kathryn Hausbeck Korgan, Ph.D.
Graduate College Interim Dean
Abstract
Identity formation has been conceptualized in communication studies, but holds reduced presence as applied to contemporary cases involving the reality documentary television genre. This study investigates identity formation by examining the reality television series WAGs (Wives and Girlfriends of Sports Stars). This study utilized social identity theory as a lens through which an examination of how female partners of professional sports stars manage identity via the social medium platform of Twitter, with consideration to whether the identity management reinforces or negates identities portrayed on WAGs. In order to examine if the identity management reinforces or negates identities portrayed on WAGs, one hundred and seventy-five Tweets from the Twitter accounts of three WAGs were analyzed and coded under three different categories. Results demonstrate that a nonsignificant difference exists between identity formation strategies used and the relational status of the WAGs; however, some within category distributional differences exist. Additional results, discussion and future directions follow.

Keywords: identity, self, status, media, social identity theory, group memberships
Acknowledgments

I hold the acknowledgments section of my thesis with the utmost regards. Without the immense help of this group of individuals, my project would have not been possible. First of all, thank you to my amazing advisor, Dr. Tara EmmersSommer. Tara, how can I possibly thank the person that changed my way of looking at the world and my career? You have taught me to think critically as a worldview II scholar and have made this process such an enlightening and memorable one. Thank you for our endless conversations, your guidance, sports pep talks, constant encouragement, and timely feedback on my endless drafts. You were an amazing professor, advisor, and mentor. I hope to one day change the world through my research like you have and look forward to many conversations about future projects. Last but not least, as you always say, Starbucks checky-check!

Another big thank you to Dr. Jennifer Guthrie for her helpful suggestions on my thesis and encouragement throughout the program. Dr. G, your research concerning topics about using strengths to obtain relational health in good standing alongside positive social change and familiarity was helpful to my project. Also, your knowledge on coding was also of big help. Your positive attitude is contagious and I am extremely grateful to have had you as a committee member and to have been your student multiple times during undergrad. We go way back. From our coffee dates and kind words of “You can do this!” and “Inch by inch, life’s a cinch!” have meant so much to me this past year. Thank you so much, Jenny!

Thank you Dr. Engstrom for your encouragement throughout my journey dating all the way back to undergrad. You taught me to always keep pushing no matter what adversity I face. Thank you for the lighthearted conversations concerning sports, Tim Tebow, and bro hugs. Those conversations reminded me to enjoy the journey I am on and not stress so much. We both
know I am a student who takes school seriously and always strives to be the best of the best. While that is great, wonderful, and fine enjoying your passion is what matters most. When you truly enjoy your passion that is when you learn more about yourself and the person you hope to become. Thank you for those wonderful life lessons I will treasure forever.

Dr. David Dickens is another person I would like to acknowledge. Dr. Dickens, I could not think of anybody I would rather have as my outside committee member. Your research interests on critical and postmodern theories such as social identity theory was very beneficial throughout the process of my thesis. Thank you, again, for all the time you spent on my thesis.

I would also like to acknowledge Jeffrey Coon for his encouragement along the way of my thesis and for assisting with the coding of the articles. Jeffrey, your background as Helen Neil’s research assistant and general insight were the perfect contribution to my project. I am so blessed you were readily available to even be an inter-reliability coder for my project. Without you this project would not be standing on its feet. Thank you for all the time you spent with the Tweets and for the long discussions we had after. I now consider you a friend and wish you all the best with your future endeavors.

I would also like to thank William Belk for his guidance throughout the entire program and for always having his door open to me. Professor Belk, since day 1, you have always made me feel that despite all the trials and tribulations, I was going to get through this program just fine. I always felt like I was a bother with all of my questions and need to tell you my whole life story. But no matter what you withheld an open door policy. You are an incredible role model through your teaching and have made me love doing it as well. Thank you.

Lastly, I would like to thank the amazing cohort from the Department of Communication
Studies, both past and present. Larissa Teran, L-Rizzle, and Courtney McDaniel, C-Nastee, my first year officemates, I could not imagine my first year without you and the countless days, weeks we spent together in GUA 4121. Both of you were so kind to me since you met me and have always motivated me to be the best I can be. To my current GUA 4121 chicas, Rachel Allen, Stephanie Willes, and Cynthia Kaiser, it has been an absolute pleasure to be your officemates this past year. Your energy and constant encouragement has been so refreshing to be around. 4121 is in your hands now! Although I have only known you two for a short while it feels like we have known each other for a lifetime. I am so lucky to have found ya’ll and I have no doubt that you both will be amazing professors one day. Gabby Scholl, thank you for being an amazing friend, for going to happy hour with me for mountain dew, and for always being there to answer any questions I had about teaching or my thesis. Big thanks to my mom, Big Grandma, and Gabby Scholl for being my cheerleaders during my thesis defense, it meant so much to feel that support from you. To everyone else in my cohort, Allison Simpson, Alex Simpson, Robert Burgy, Emily Major, Patrice Bisbee, Logan Sowell, Ross Jones, Hope Sauced, and Darrian “Super Bowl” Carroll. I love you all. Your kind words of support are what got me through these past two years. I am #blessed to have met you all in this program and without a doubt call you my second family.
Dedication

I would like to dedicate my thesis to my family. Thank you to my mom, my dad, uncle Paulie, Nana, Pa, Big Grandma, Aunt Tami, Uncle Sonny, Grandma Pam, Uncle Ricky, the Mobley family, the Bentz family, the Waltz family, the Flores family, the Yambao family, the Oxford Family, the Strong family, the Huizing family, the Beasley family, and the Allman family. You all were so helpful throughout my thesis and understood that time was of the essences. No matter what, you supported me and constantly reminded me when I often forgot that I could do anything I set my mind to. Mama, my #1 cheerleader on and off the field and best friend, where do I start. You introduced my passion towards reading and writing at a young age. After numerous conversation about whether I should go to grad school now or wait you kicked my butt into gear and told me to go now. Diddy, a large part of the person I am is because of you. The love I have for everything sports, entertainment, history, southern culture, Florida Georgia Line, and media related is because of you. Because of you I own the fact that I think I am the funniest and smartest girl in the world. God blessed me with you and despite the circumstances I will always love you. Everything I do now and will do in the future is for you two. I will always strive to make you the happiest parents on earth. Here’s to the next adventure as I move on to become Fox Five’s Associate Producer!

Thank you to the rest of my family both blood related and extended. You all have no idea what your undying support has meant to me on this two-year journey. You all offered words of encouragement that helped to lift me when I was feeling down and motivated me to push through to the finish line. You always told me to never give up and that I am going to leave a mark in this world untouched. Thank you for being there every early morning phone call when I was feeling
angst and anguished. Find your $2 McDonald Mccaffes in a mailbox near you soon! Last but not least GO DAWGS!
# Table of Contents

Abstract .......................................................................................................................................................... iii  
Acknowledgment .......................................................................................................................................... iv  
Dedication .................................................................................................................................................. vii  
List of tables ............................................................................................................................................... xii  
Chapter 1: Introduction – Social Identity Theory for Reality Documentary Television ....................... 1  
  Statement of Problem ................................................................................................................................. 5  
Chapter 2: Literature Review ...................................................................................................................... 11  
  Athlete’s Partners .................................................................................................................................... 11  
  Properties and characteristics of the wife co-culture ............................................................................. 19  
  Self and Identity ...................................................................................................................................... 20  
  Celebrity as a lived experience ................................................................................................................. 21  
  Role Engulfment ..................................................................................................................................... 23  
  Theoretical Perspective ........................................................................................................................... 25  
    Developing Social Identity ..................................................................................................................... 26  
    Group Memberships ............................................................................................................................. 26  
    The Digital Age .................................................................................................................................... 28  
    Social Media Platform .......................................................................................................................... 29  
Chapter 3: Method .................................................................................................................................... 33  
  Procedure ................................................................................................................................................ 33  
  Sample .................................................................................................................................................... 35  
  Data Analysis ........................................................................................................................................... 41  
Chapter 4: Results and Interpretation .......................................................................................................... 45
Additional Analyses .................................................................45

Natalie.................................................................47
  Identity formed through self.................................................47
  Identity formed through status of partner..............................48
  Identity formed through media (producer)..............................48

Autumn.................................................................50
  Identity formed through self.................................................50
  Identity formed through status of partner..............................51
  Identity formed through media (producer)..............................52

Ashley.................................................................53
  Identity formed through self.................................................53
  Identity formed through status of partner..............................54
  Identity formed through media (producer)..............................55

Chapter 5: Discussion.............................................................57
  Summary of Findings............................................................60
  Limitations.................................................................62
  Future Directions...........................................................64
  Conclusion.................................................................67

Appendix...............................................................70
References.................................................................131
Curriculum Vitae..............................................................151
List of Tables

Table 1: Frequency Data Across Women and Coding Categories (X^2 Calculations) ........46
Chapter 1: Introduction-Social Identity Theory for Reality Documentary Television

Ayesha Alexander is a Canadian–American chef, cookbook author, television personality, actress, and model. She made several guest roles in multiple television shows and movies, she began hosting her own show, Ayesha’s Homemade (a.k.a. Ayesha’s Home Kitchen), on the Food Network in 2016. Her career in culinary kicked off in 2014 when she prepared her first meal as a YouTube demonstration on her channel Little Lights of Mine. Alexander’s official channel trailer for Little Lights of Mine was released on February 10, 2014, and received 620,000 views. Within the 55-second clip, Alexander describes herself as being a wife and mom to her daughter Riley. She informs viewers that the channel is about everything that brings light to her life, makes her passionate, happy, and joyful. The second episode of Little Lights of Mine aired on February 19, 2014, NBA All-Star Sunday, and received 2.7 million views. Throughout this episode, Ayesha takes viewers on a journey documenting her family’s entire day while in New Orleans for NBA All-Star weekend. It is during this episode that viewers are first introduced to her husband, NBA superstar and champion Stephen Curry, guard for the Golden State Warriors. Despite Stephen Curry’s elite NBA champion and superstar status, Ayesha seemingly aspired to form, maintain, and reify an identity distinct from being “so-and-so’s” wife (i.e., “Stephen Curry’s wife”). In an interview with Forbes Magazine, Ayesha Curry states, “I don’t want to be just a lifestyle guru for the millennials. I want to cater to all markets” (Homayun, 2017, para. 3). Ayesha wrote the cookbook titled, The Seasoned Life, and published it in 2016, and has now introduced the Ayesha Curry Kitchenware brand. Forbes magazine chronicles Ayesha’s recent successes as the “building of an empire” (Homayun, 2017, para. 5). Ayesha’s branding of herself as an independent businesswoman in her own right, as an identity and
image other than that of “Stephen Curry’s wife,” prompts attention as to the notion of identity. Indeed, being the significant other to someone in the public eye—to a marquee player—might be perceived as a calling card to one wife, a potential albatross to another, or somewhere in between. How an individual creates, manages and reifies identity not only tells a story, but communicates a message to the viewers, listeners, and readers—a message that could undoubtedly impact and influence the consumer’s own identity.

Ayesha is one example of a wife of a sports star and their lives are illustrated on a show called WAGs. Now although Ayesha is not specifically examined in this study the three women that are made a consistent appearance on the show. WAGs is an American reality documentary television series on E! network that chronicles both the professional and personal lives of several women in an elite circle of professional athletes. The show brings opulence, ambition and drama. WAG Sasha Gates says, “When people look at us they see the glitz and the glam, but there’s a lot of things that come with being in this type of relationship,” (“First look: WAGS exposes the elite world of pro athletes’ partners,” 2015, para. 2). She goes on to say, “However, you’re walking in there, it’s a representation of your man, too, and I gotta represent him the best I can,” says Gates, who’s married to San Diego Chargers tight end Antonio Gates (“First look: WAGs exposes the elite world of pro athletes’ partners,” 2015, para. 3). Some WAGs take a different perspective on the show. Ashley North, who’s engaged to Washington Redskins free safety Dashon Goldson, points out the less glamorous side of being involved with someone super high-profile: “You know that you’re not always [your partner’s] No. 1 priority, and you have to be comfortable with that,” (“First look: WAGs exposes the elite world of pro athletes’ partners,” 2015, para. 4). Many of the latter could be avoided if the younger WAGs would heed Gates’ warning: “Know your place in the
hierarchy. There are rules,” (“First look: WAGs exposes the elite world of pro athletes’ partners,” 2015, para. 4). To illuminate once more, the show provides a back context or backstage to what this piece is about. The show provides a nice context as to how women appear within the reality television genre and how they take control of their identity using social media platforms.

Specific to WAGs, there are several identities managed via social media (e.g., Twitter) to explore. Of consideration is how the women examined in the current investigation use Twitter to create and maintain their identity to the outside world. That is, do they identify as an ingroup WAG to the outside world (i.e., the outgroup)? Are identities within the WAG identification parceled to groupings within the ingroup (e.g. a wife within the group identifies differently than a non-wife; the wife of a franchise player identifies differently than the wife of a bench players, etc).

In consideration of identity, one reflects upon the words of Descartes, “I think, therefore I am.” Beyond the need of control, is the innate drive toward establishing a sense of identity. Many social theories address formulating a sense of identity. Psychologist Abraham Maslow defined a hierarchy of needs, with the particular revelation that when lower level needs are not met, then higher-level needs will consequently be abandoned in favor of shoring up the deficit needs (Kellerman, 2014). Maslow’s hierarchy of needs is five tiered and comprised of the following: physiological, safety, belonging, esteem, and self-actualization (Kellerman, 2014; Martin & Joomis, 2007). The latter three needs are concerned with individuals and their sense of identity. An individual’s awareness of identity appears early in life as infants begin separating the self from an undifferentiated unity with their mother (Gerson, 2005). According to psychoanalyst Donald Winnicott, as cited by Gerson (2005), the young child will then
cling to what is known as a “transition object,” to replace the part of their identity presumed to be lost, thus causing distress (p. 108). Winnicott found that this pattern continues through the lifespan, therefore, causing one to begin to identify with their possessions and surroundings (Gerson, 2005; Bowlby, 1956).

Individuals soon find that they are comprised of a myriad of identities (Greer & Egan, 2012). Consider a runner, cyclist, mother, father, coach, brother, wife, teacher, just to name a few, in isolation or collectively. The wording and labeling that are used to signify one’s role are important given that goals, purposes, and perception of the world is denoted through language (Rozanov, 2016). Specifically, the language used to identify oneself contributes to one’s identity. For example, “I am a runner” is different to “I enjoy running” or “I am a footballer” is different to “I enjoy playing football.” The latter is merely describing an activity being performed, whilst the former, “I am,” implies a goal, purpose, or perception of one’s identity. The different identities held have expectations and meanings attached that can be attributed to internal (the person) and external (societal) loci of control (Matthews, Lauermann, & Banerjee, 2014). For example, saying “John is an autistic child” is variant from “John is a child with autism.” The former creates and denotes an identity whereas the latter places the child at the center and the challenge as peripheral. The value dimension (a term coined by Ashmore, Deaux, & McLaughlin-Volpe, 2004) of identity formation is an internally negotiated dimension of identity. Furthermore, “It reflects the degree of value or importance a person attaches to an aspect of his or her self-concept,” (Matthews et al., 2014, p. 2357). Alternatively, the literature on belonging (also coined attachment and interconnectedness, Ashmore et al., 2004) describes an ecologically
sensitive element of identity that reflects wanting to belong to a group that is viewed as part of the individual’s self-concept.

The multiple identities people have are ranked in a hierarchy per their importance. Those identities that have greatest importance play out repetitiously. According to Greer and Egan (2012), “even as people attempt to meet the demands of their several roles in life, identity theory, as proposed by Stryker (1968), suggests that people organize their multiple role identities into a hierarchical structure of importance” (p. 465). When people do not fathom other people's behavior it is because the identity choice have dissimilar salience (Greer & Egan, 2012). This indicates that salience influences people's effort put in a task, behaviors displayed and eventually their performances. However, a growing body of research has demonstrated salience to not only be an organic construction of the individual, but a by-product of the media as well. Mass mediated means of communication are influential due to their ability to reach large numbers of people (Zhang & Haller, 2013). In regards to this project, the media (producers of the show) may deem an identity more salient than the WAG. The messages the media communicates concerning the WAGs’ identity may be different than what the WAG intended for. Therefore, impacting how the consumer not only sees the WAG, but themselves as well. The viewers of the show look for a parallelism with how the WAGs identify on both social media networks, such as Twitter, and the show. When the identities no longer align, confusion is spawned within the viewer between a sense of self and others regarding the WAG.

Statement of Problem

In her book Wedded to the Game: The Real Lives of NFL Women, Shannon O’Toole (2006) provides firsthand accounts of women married to professional football players and
coaches in the United States. Her book highlights how these women are often primarily labeled as “football wives” because their identity becomes associated socially with their husbands’ careers. She states:

Whether they like it or not, NFL women are defined by who their husbands are and what they do for a living. The women become ‘football wives’ and there is no escaping the label. Some women accept it with great pride, and others hide their association with the NFL as much as possible, for once this association is revealed, it becomes their primary identity, even with friends. (O’Toole, 2006, p. 82)

A limited, but growing, body of scholarly literature on athletes’ wives has reverberated this sentiment, noting that most people have a tendency to refer to these women as “so-and-so’s wife,” rather than referring to the woman as an individual (Binns-Terrill 2012; Gmelch & San Antonio 2001; McKenzie 1999; Ortiz 2006; Roderick 2012; Thompson 1995, 1999). Such manners of reference are influenced by the media and what the media presents are bound to have an impact on public opinion (McCombs & Shaw, 2009; McCombs, 2009). Television, specifically reality documentary television, has become one of the most powerful forms of media (Pahad, Karkare, & Bhatt, 2015).

The moving images of television facilitate people with unfamiliar concepts and topics of discussion, demand attention, and eventually influence their thoughts and behavior (Pahad, Karkare, & Bhatt, 2015). It is often suggested that media have potentially profound effects on the social identity formation of those in close, intimate relationships. Current research demonstrates that transitional periods increase identity exploration and changes in identity (Anthis, 2002). There are numerous transitional periods that happen on reality documentary television shows such as WAGS (Wives and Girlfriends of Sports Stars) due to the status of the athlete changing (i.e. starting QB demoted to second string).
A lesson quickly taught to the wives, fiancées, and girlfriends of successful athletes is that their male partner being traded or becoming a free agent is never out of the question. One always has to be prepared as the status of being fully employed (e.g., being on the starting lineup for a team or to being cut) could change to being part-time (e.g., just being listed on the roster). However, the athlete is not the only one who undergoes a transitional period.

The transitional period that is of utmost concern for the purposes of this project is that of the wife, fiancée, or girlfriend of the successful athlete. The research question guiding this investigation is two-tiered. The first-tier seeks to address how female partners of sportsmen manage their identity via the social network system (SNS) Twitter. The management of identity is categorized using three a-priori codes: identity separate from that of their male partner, identity formed through the status of the sportsmen, identity formed through the media (the show). The second-tier asks whether the identity management reinforces or negates identities (group memberships) portrayed on the reality show WAGs (Social Identity Theory)? In regard to the latter question, prior theoretical and empirical studies conducted by Cotton (1999) and Stryker and Burke (2000) attend to the context people’s social circles provide for their identity management and serve validation of identity, reminding people of their initially casted beliefs, values, and their abilities (as cited in Soulsby & Bennett, 2015). Furthermore, Tajfel (1979) proclaims that “the groups (e.g., social class, family, football team, etc.) which people belonged to were an important source of pride and self-esteem. Groups give us a sense of social identity: a sense of belonging to the social world” (p. 47). Social identity theory states specifically that members of the ingroup will discriminate against the outgroup to enhance their self-image (Tajfel, 1979). The central hypothesis of social identity theory is “group members of an
ingroup will seek to find negative aspects of an out-group, thus enhancing their self-image” (McLeod, 2008, para. 7).

The social circles seen on shows like WAGs are often comprised of fellow wives, girlfriends, former wives or girlfriends, and/or fiancées (or former fiancées) on the show or social circles developed prior to casting. Social circles provide a sense of belonging or “personal feeling or perception of an individual as they related to or interacted with others, a group, or a system that was separate from an individual’s actions, behavior or social participation” (Mahar, Cobigo, & Stuart, 2013, p. 1029). To date, the WAGs series has focused on the female partner of a male athlete and, although the female significant other can hold a current or former partnered role in the male athlete’s life, for the purpose of the current investigation, “partner” from here onward refers to current wives, fiancées or girlfriends. Myriad relational designations exist, but for the purpose of this study, the units of analyses are women in these relational designations. This study seeks to observe how their identity is created, maintained and reified through such interactions on the show, with their partner, and as reflected on Twitter.

The relevance of this central, guiding argument is that the media are used as a learning tool. From a uses and gratifications (U&G) communication perspective individuals will tune into the media outlet that best fulfills their needs and wants (Papacharissi, 2008). Furthermore, “these needs are expressed as motives for adopting particular medium use, and are connected to the social and psychological makeup of the individual,” (Papacharissi, 2008, p. 137). However, there is an embedded desire to better understand messages and their effects, and grounds its analysis in communication narrowly defined. This is due in part to the, “complexities of image, style, resonance, narratively, history, metaphor, and so
on reduced in favor of content that can be more precisely, some say more objectively, described,” (Newcomb & Hirsch, 1983, p. 561). Newcomb and Hirsch also found that, “content categories are not allowed to emerge from the text, as is the case in naturalistic observation and in textual analysis. Rather they are predefined in order to be measured more easily. The incidence of certain content categories may be cited as significant, or their ‘effects’ more clearly correlated with some behavior,” (1983, p. 561). With that being said, hopefully the findings from this investigation inform the literature on identity and identity management. As a result, future investigation can examine how such mediated portrayals of identity affect the identities and identity management of viewership, particularly female viewership. For example, social learning theory argues that individuals, more likely than not, adopt attitudes and behaviors that they perceive as positively rewarded (Bandura, 1994). Although social learning theory is not the theoretical framework associated with the current investigation, the argument is nevertheless worthy of mention given a show such as WAGs depicts the women in an often materially rewarding lifestyle.

Gaining a better understanding of how identity is formed through self, status of the sportsmen, and media can inform the literature because beyond the basic need for a feeling of control is the enmeshed drive toward a sense of identity and answering Maslow’s question of “Who am I?” Perhaps one can only speculate as to how Maslow might have accounted for the media and the hegemonic control it can often exert. With specific regard to the dialectical tension experienced with displaying an identity of an individual that is actual vs. represented. Given the shortage of research in this area, uncovering this information could have practical implications. Thus, the current study examines the perceptions of identity and whether it is formed through the self, status of the sportsmen, or is constructed via mediated portrayals. To begin, it is appropriate to review the recent
popularity in the media over the topic of athletes’ partners and to consider the previous literature regarding theoretical explanations and social identity theory.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

Athlete’s Partners

The topic of athletes’ partners has gained popularity in the media over the past decade. Originating in the United Kingdom, the prominent term WAGs is often used when referring to these women. Specifically, as aforementioned, WAGs refers to wives and girlfriends of sports stars. It is not uncommon nowadays for television cameras to focus on these women at games or for them to be asked to volunteer their time for charity. Similarly, it is also not uncommon for pictures and stories about these women’s lives to appear in newspapers, magazines, and/or on social media platforms such as Twitter. Various reality television shows have depicted the lives of women married to professional athletes, such as VH1’s Basketball Wives, started by creator Shaunie O’ Neal (ex-wife of NBA superstar and champion Shaquille O’ Neal), and E!’s WAGs. The Canadian show Hockey Wives premiered on the W Network on March 18, 2015. These shows offer an insider perspective on the daily lives of women dating and married to professional athletes all the while portray a glamorous lifestyle. Also illustrated are the difficulties and stressful situations these wives face because of their husbands’ careers. This reality show confirms stereotypical images found in the tabloid media, which often portray these women as beautiful, thin and wealthy, living glamorous lifestyles with few worries (Clayton & Harris 2004; Roderick, 2012) and positively rewarded (Bandura, 1994). This imagery reproduces masculine hegemony in professional sport (Clayton & Harris, 2004). These women are often portrayed as submissive and passive relative to their husbands, thus potentially contributing to the impression in viewers’ minds that all women are similar by default (Clayton & Harris, 2004).
While these aforementioned depictions exist (e.g., beautiful, rich, glamorous) in media representations, they differ (at times, dramatically) from the lived experiences of athletes’ wives studied to date (for example Binns-Terrill 2012; Gmelch & San Antonio 2001; Ortiz 1997, 2001, 2002, 2003, 2006, 2011; Roderick 2012; Thompson 1995). To further explain, a major contributor to the literature on athletes’ wives is Steven Ortiz (1997, 2001, 2002, 2003, 2006, 2011), whose ethnography included 48 in-depth interviews with wives of professional athletes from MLB, NFL, NBA, and NHL. Drawing on the concept of a career-dominated marriage, Ortiz (2002) describes life for an athlete’s wife in a sports marriage, which requires them [athletes’ wives] to support their husbands’ high-profile, elite-status, lofty-income, and stressful occupation. These wives tend to steer lives characterized by, “geographic mobility, sometimes instability, and deal with their husband’s routine and extended absences from home because of work-related travel, (p. 528). Ortiz (2002; 2006) argues that women married to professional athletes learn through marital and emotional socialization to be responsible for family care work, to enact a “wife of” role, and to participate within the marriage in a “two-person career” (see also Finch 1983; Papanek 1973). Some of the potential responsibilities when enacting the “wife of” role are providing the necessary care and support when their wife has undergone potential injury, rehab, or painkiller dependency, among other issues, while often simultaneously trying to balance demanding family care as well as “manning the fort” at home with the children. These expectations and responsibilities extend to trying to give their wife constancy and stability if traded unexpectedly. In this quickly arising, abrupt, and time sensitive circumstance (i.e., the husband athlete is traded), the wife often then has to consider whether to uproot the children or navigate a commuter marriage. For instance, Kobe Byrant, in his farewell speech as he retired from being a Los Angeles Laker, openly
acknowledged his wife Vanessa for managing the family and home front due to the demands of his career (Vikraman, 2016). Many male athletes also publicly acknowledge their mother with accolades and gratitude for their support during their upbringing and rise through the professional athletic ranks seemingly more often than they do for their fathers (Nessif, 2014).

Ortiz (2002) examines how the professional athlete’s wife must manage the domestic side of their life and try to make “the family stress free for him” (p. 3). He furthers this argument by describing how these women engage in “control work” (p. 3). That is, they control the domestic side of their shared lives as a response to the unpredictable nature of their husbands’ careers. By supporting their husbands’ careers, these women feel needed, loved and validated. Gmelch and San Antonio (2001) confirm Ortiz’s analysis of the traditional roles enacted by athletes’ wives in their study on how the structure and constraint (high geographical mobility, husband’s frequent absence, and the precariousness of baseball careers) of professional baseball careers shapes their lives. Gmelch and San Antonio (2001) found that a baseball wife’s prestige role is to support her husband by taking on the tedious responsibility of their daily life and parenting and, more importantly, placing their own career plans on hold. Gmelch and San Antonio (2001) illustrate how baseball culture idealized as exuding a male dominance and, in doing so, glamorizing images of home and family: “[P]layers and coaches need wives to have ‘homes.’ Wives provide companionship, stability, and emotional support off the field—all positive goods in the baseball world” (Gmelch & San Antonio 2001, p.353). Gmelch and San Antonio’s focus on women’s performance of domestic labor is a topic commonly explored in the literature. Their findings support other reports that most athletes’ wives
embrace the role of a traditional housewife and make personal sacrifices for their husbands’ careers in exchange for a glamorous lifestyle consumed of money and status (Binns-Terrill 2012; Gmelch & San Antonio 2001; Ortiz 2002, 2006, 2011; Roderick, 2012; Thompson 1999). Some extant research on military wives, for example, might inform the WAGs’ literature in terms of the woman “holding down the fort” while a partner is away (Sahlstein, Maguire, & Timmerman, 2009). Yet, differences between military wives and WAGs do exist. For example, the partner of a military partner can be deployed for very long periods of time without an “off season” and there likely exist monetary differentials that are reflected in lifestyle (e.g., living on the Base vs. Beverly Hills). WAGs, unlike military partners or partners in long distance relationships, often experience a more extravagant lifestyle in the public eye.

Some research has focused on the interactions and relationships between athletes’ wives (Binns-Terrill 2012; Ortiz 1997; Thompson 1995, 1999). Findings indicate that socializing with other wives is common and that they often attend public events and team related occasions together. The wives also take part in team charity events and team-related family social events (Binns-Terrill 2012; Ortiz, 1997; Thompson 1995). Given these women often live in similar social situations, Thompson (1995) found that hockey wives often develop their own group culture. Within these contexts, some women stay both distant and affable with other wives. While others will develop close friendships with two or three other wives, offering support for each other (Thompson). Thompson also found that hockey wives are reluctant to make friendships outside of hockey because they worry that people outside of sport are interested in their friendship only as a way of getting close to their husband (Thompson). The uncertainties of the professional sports career can also make women less inclined to invest in outside friendships because there is
always a chance that their husband might be traded or signed to another team. For example, Gmelch and San Antonio (2001) found that baseball wives are often isolated—they may be “friendly with fellow baseball wives, but these relationships are seldom long-standing or again deep due to their husband’s mobility” (p. 340). These studies highlight some of the potential problems athletes’ wives face in forming lasting friendships as well as ingroup identity.

The literature also suggests that many athletes’ wives are required to follow a “code of conduct.” This code might consist of following informal rules and norms set by the team’s co-culture or official rules issued by the team’s organization (Ortiz, 1997; 2011; Thompson, 1995). Ortiz (1997) illustrates the types of informal rules baseball wives adhere to while traveling with the baseball club: there were certain players who the players’ wives could or could not talk to on airplanes and buses; wives were to stay out of hotel bars; and they had to display appropriate emotions and behaviors based on to the team’s performance (e.g., no laughing and appearing happy after a loss). While players, coaches, or organizations set these rules informally, some sport teams do have official rules and expectations for these women. For example, the following official memo, drafted by the NHL, was placed on an NHL’s hockey team’s bulletin board. Although it is lengthy, it shows how wives’ conduct is regulated as a result of their husbands’ careers through formal rules:

“To: All Hockey Wives

1. Talk about other players only as you want heard about your own husband. 2. Don’t let the ups and downs of your husband’s career or the way he is going on the ice, at any given time, affect your behavior. 3. No error is funny because your man has 80 games a year in which to duplicate it or maybe make it worse.
4. Fans may upset you but as long as he is on the ice, he belongs to the team and to the game, not you. 5. Trades are made by the front office. Though good friends are leaving, the merits of a trade belong in the front office. No trade is ever approved by Good Housekeeping. 6. Since your husband is in the NHL, he is a star. The life of the wives of stars is a happy one. The paydays have been healthy and regular for a long time. Your husband plays every game and every night seems like Academy Award Night. Your biggest question may be deciding what products to endorse. The wives of the star must become natural leaders of the hockey wives society. You must be careful not to form too tight a clique or the hockey club could find itself in the struggle between the high rent district and the middle class instead of one for the title. 7. Tell your husband you don’t play hockey, you WORK at hockey. The true hockey wife knows that hockey is not a game when your paycheck depends on his ability to perform. 8. You husband is something special to us and to you. Help us care for him. (The Waiting Game as cited in Thompson 1995, p. 20)

In this example, the NHL organization clearly provides guidelines and expectations for hockey wives. Both the informal baseball rules addressed by Ortiz (1997) and the formal NHL rules by Thompson (1995) illustrate how women are socialized into the world professional sport and learn to support their husbands’ career, behave in public, interact with other wives and defer to their husbands’ careers (Ortiz, 1997, 2002). However, there have been instances in which wives have broken protocol by speaking up. For example, Gisele Bundchen would have “broken the rules,” given the NFL had a protocol for wives. Bundchen said in an interview with CBS This Morning that “her Super Bowl-winning husband had a concussion last year when asked about her desire for him to
retire soon,” (Gleeson, 2017, para. 1). She then moved on to say “I don’t really think it’s a healthy thing for your body to go through. You know, that kind of aggression all the time, that cannot be healthy for you,” (Gleeson, 2017, para. 2). Interestingly, some might argue that Gisele has an active voice given her brand and out earning of Tom, whereas a partner of a non-franchise player might not speak up out of fear of his career implications. Recently, Ortiz (2011) documented the emotional work athletes’ wives do as part of the unwritten rules of the sport marriage. Drawing on Hochschild (1983, 1990), Ortiz (2011) focuses on how these women use emotional management to convey the “right emotional” demeanor for appropriate situations (“feeling rules”) and how to convey these to others (“display rules”) as a form of invisible marital labor within a sport marriage. These rules include, presenting her wife face, sharing moods, managing her emotions at home, and performing her wifely duty. Presenting her wife face means wives have to express the right public image, maintain their poise and avoid making the wrong face in public (Ortiz, 2011). Furthermore, wives are socialized to subordinate their emotions to their husbands’ or the teams’ emotions (Ortiz, 1997, 2011). For example, when problems arise at home, wives tend to be reluctant to make an issue out of them for fear of upsetting their wives during the sports season. Instead, they will wait until the season is over to share their concerns. Another emotional management strategy includes performing her “wifely duty,” which means making themselves available sexually so that their husbands are not tempted to seek out extramarital relationships. In sum, these women become socialized to accept their male career-dominated relationships and have normalized their use of emotion management to serve the team’s needs. Thus, the husband and team identities are seemingly privileged over the identity of the wife. This hierarchical placement could have profound negative effects on the wives’ emotional stability (Ortiz, 2011).
Finally, the majority of the studies on athletes’ wives confirm that a struggle experienced by these women is establishing their own identity (Cronson & Mitchell 1987; Gmelch & San Antonio, 2001; McKenzie 1999; Ortiz 2002, 2006, 2011; Roderick, 2012; Thompson, 1995, 1999). As Thompson (1999) argues, hockey wives find it hard to establish their own identities because they are consumed by their husbands’ careers (Thompson, 1999; McKenzie, 1999). Notably, Thompson (1995) found that hockey wives described how, as often being very young when they met their husbands, “they were really too young to have established their own identity” (p. 55) and came to perceive themselves as part of the team. It can be inferred that in a different time, a different place, the women might have reacted differently. For example, if the women were already established in their own right when they met their future husbands, they might not see their identity as intertwined with his. More recently, Binns-Terrill (2012) conducted a detailed ethnographic and narrative inquiry looking into the lives of NFL wives. Her work focused on the candid procedure and struggles these women face in negotiating what she calls “dueling selves” and their identities in their romantic relationships. She found a “relational dialectic of dependence/independence” in that NFL wives strive to have their own identities, but at the same time want to be the NFL wife, which means “individuality is sacrificed to be a part of the NFL team experience; that may mean not only identifying with the team, but also becoming an extension of the NFL player,” (Binns-Terrill, 2012, p. 326). This tension suggests that these women do not just lose their identities but are constantly negotiating who they are, both during and post-professional career.

Given this body of research and the common themes present in the literature, this study aims to see if similar patterns of external/internal social constraints and identity uncertainties will exist in WAGs. This investigation examines identity from the
perspective of WAGs, women who conduct their everyday lives as part of an intimate relationship with a professional sport player. Of interest is how these women attempt to be active agents who negotiate willingness to transform themselves to meet the demands of the sports life. In other words, the identity of “so-and-so’s partner” is always emerging and changing in relation to the messages received about being a wife, fiancé, or girlfriend in interaction with others (both insiders and outsiders of the social world of the sports world) and in new situations encountered.

Properties and Characteristics of the Wife Co-culture

Athletes’ partners socialize and form co-cultures around the sportsmen’s team (Binns-Terrill, 2012; Ortiz, 1997; Thompson, 1995, 1999). Each team within a particular league can develop its own co-culture. Thompson (1995, 1999) found that hockey wives belong to a co-culture particular to their husbands’ team rather than to an overarching co-culture of hockey wives. Similarly, Canadian Football League (CFL) wives form their own wife co-cultures based on teams, which is due to the fact that most of their interactions, especially during the season, occur with the wives of their husbands’ teammates (Thompson, 1995, 1999). Additionally, involvement in these wife co-cultures varies from team to team in the league. Some teams’ wife co-cultures are highly organized, while others will barely develop. Membership in the football wife co-culture is contingent upon a woman’s husband being on the football team and that the couple has met an agreed-upon status of commitment. Specifically, joining and being accepted into a wife team co-culture confirms the football wife identity. In this way, a wife co-culture is a courtesy co-culture that is derived from their husband’s activities and status (i.e., husband makes the football team, football wife is afforded membership to the team’s wife co-culture if she presents herself as authentic and committed to the relationship). Belonging
to these wife co-cultures provides these women with a social network, companionship, help with children, and a place where they can share common interests as well as fears about the problems that arise from a career in professional sport (e.g., career mobility and job insecurity) (Thompson, 1995, 1999).

**Self and Identity**

As a result of becoming a part of a co-culture by virtue of being the wife (or significant other) to an elite athlete, the women begin to internalize their partners’ activities, actions, and accomplishments and incorporate them into their own identities. Through their participation in the partner co-culture and their interaction with other football wives, fiancées, and girlfriends, these women learn the mannerisms, attitudes, norms and behaviors associated with being a “good” football wife, fiancée, or girlfriend (Thompson, 1995, 1999). The degree to which a particular wife, fiancée, or girlfriend embraces that role varies, often due to an internal hierarchy within the co-culture. Specifically, while some players are a part of what is called a franchise (a franchise player is an elite player who is often perceived as being a face of the team), other players are perceived as merely bench players. As a result, some football wives, fiancées, and girlfriends will be active in the co-culture and attend many of its social events; others will avoid fellow wives, fiancées, and girlfriends due to perceived status differentials. Involvement in the co-culture entertains a significant role in these women’s day-to-day experiences. The partner co-cultures become instant support networks for women who find themselves in a strange city without any friends (Thompson, 1995, 1999).
Many women benefit from this particular support system because of their shared understanding of a career in professional football. While many women benefit from this co-culture, they are also pushed toward traditional gender behaviors and expectations in order to be a “good” football wife, fiancée, or girlfriend (Thompson, 1995; 1999). This is apparent in the rules about inclusivity/exclusivity regarding the activities and discussions that go on among the women and in the informal status divisions characterized of the co-cultures (Thompson, 1995, 1999). The partner co-culture can be seen as a mechanism for keeping football wives in line with maintaining a supportively subservient role in the relationship (Thompson, 1995, 1999). In this way the co-culture acts as a mechanism of both socialization, social control, support, and ostracism (if the woman is treated as an outsider or lower in the hierarchy—that is, ingroup vs. outgroup).

Celebrity as A Lived Experience

The scholarship around celebrity and fame tends to be framed in reference to the experiences of major movie or television stars, politicians, musicians and athletes (Adler & Adler 1991; Anderson & Jackson 2001; Ferris 2007, 2010; Forsyth & Thompson 2007; Gmelch & San Antonio, 1998). Minimal attention has focused on the ways wives, fiancées, and girlfriends of celebrities’ experience fame. In the past, athletes’ wives, fiancées, and girlfriends tended to be hidden in the shadows of their famous partners. Today, however, athletes’ wives, fiancées, and girlfriends are frequently seen as an extension of their partner, and people monitor their appearance and activities in order to look for clues about their celebrity wife, fiancée, or girlfriend’s identity (Binns-Terrill, 2012).

Television cameras often focus on athletes’ significant others at sporting events and their daily activities are sometimes chronicled (for example, Hockey Wives and
Basketball Wives). In addition, the recent upswing of social media and social networking sites has increased these women’s general visibility in the public sphere. As such, the wives of high-profile athletes must learn to manage this celebrity status. They also learn about celebrity status management in the context of the marriages and within the wife co-cultures. Although I could not find any studies that focus exclusively on how wives, fiancées, and girlfriends of athletes experience the celebrity side, there may be a lot, some, or unpublished studies that do so. Ortiz (2001, 2011) discusses celebrity status in terms of how these women have to appear in public and their loss of privacy. Clayton and Harris (2004) discuss how some athletes’ wives, fiancées, and girlfriends are celebrities in their own right (Victoria Beckham, singer, model and fashion designer, is married to former English soccer star David Beckham) than how other wives experience this celebrity. Through marital and co-cultural socialization, these women learn that there are rules to being a professional athlete’s wife in public spaces that extend to their online activities, specifically the utilization of social networking and media sites such as Twitter.

Unlike other camps in sociology, which can define celebrity as pathological or celebrity as a commodity, Ferris (2007) selects for a meaning-centered approach that narrows in on the “lived experiences of celebrity from the point of view of celebrities themselves” (p. 392). Ferris (2010) also argues for an approach to celebrity that conceptualizes fame and celebrity as a dynamic process rather than a fixed state. Ferris (2010) suggests that one way this can be done is by studying regional, local or “hyper-local” celebrities in their specific context. Hills (2003) uses the term “subcultural celebrity” to define a narrower variant of celebrity when people are “treated as famous only by and for their fan audiences,” (p. 61). By this definition, the majority of CFL
players (Canadian Football League) and coaches are local or co-cultural celebrities, although a few may gain national and international repute.

The concept of “basking in reflected glory” (BIRG) provides some insight into the attention wives of professional athletes receive (Adler & Adler 1989; Burger 1985; Cialdini, Borden, Thorne, Walker, Freeman, & Reynolds 1976; Sigelman, 1986).

Originally the concept was developed to explain how students from major universities wear clothing with their schools’ logo on Mondays after Saturday football victories, especially decisive wins, than on Mondays after ties or losses (Cialdini et al. 1976; Sigelman 1986). Adler and Adler (1989, 1991) documented how boosters, the financial supporters of the team, often basked in the reflected glory of college basketball stars and received social status from mere association with them. In a similar fashion, football wives, fiancées, and girlfriends bask in the reflected glory of their sportsman’s celebrity status. However, unlike fans or boosters who can conceal and dismiss the team or players in the event of a loss, wives, fiancées, and girlfriends of professional male athletes cannot dissociate themselves. In fact, the better known the player is, typically the better known his wife, fiancée, or girlfriend becomes.

**Role Engulfment**

Once the sportsman signs a professional contract, football wives, fiancées, and girlfriends start to register that their everyday lives are going to revolve around the sportsman and their careers. They become engulfed in the role of the “football wife, fiancée, or girlfriend.” The concept of role engulfment was initially introduced by Schur (1971) to explain the process that occurs when someone who continually engages in deviant behaviors and internalizes these roles as a defining feature of self (known as secondary deviance). In their study of collegiate basketball players, Adler and Adler
(1991) illustrated role engulfment by showing how the athletes’ sense of self became taken over by their athletic role through a combination of both external and internal forces: “the athletic role’s promise to fulfill players’ dreams, its ability to make them feel important and famous, and its larger-than-life media stature” (Adler & Adler, 1991, p. 226). Role engulfment not only involves the effects of external forces (e.g., labeling) but also the internalization of the role as a part of self. In other words, when an individual consistently plays an all-consuming role it can be difficult, and at times impossible, for the individual to play other roles (Adler & Adler, 1991). Significantly, as Adler and Adler (1991) found, the athletic role became a stronger component in their definition of self and more dominant in the basketball players’ lives during their college careers. As a result, their academic and social roles were diminished and in some cases abandoned.

How women acquire the perspective that their husbands’, fiancées’, and boyfriends’ football career is the most significant factor in their lives. Specifically, through the process of relational socialization, these women learn to defer to their husband’s, fiancée’s, and boyfriend’s career, and to provide the domestic labor for the family. They become so engulfed by the world of professional sport that their sense of self becomes tied to the successes of their husbands’, fiancées’, or boyfriends’.

The aforementioned popularity in the media over the topic of athlete’s wives has been considered as well as the previous literature regarding various applied explanations. Next to address is the overarching conjectural framework and lens utilized to further examine this phenomenon, social identity theory. Through social identity theory, content from media appears to echo with the audience in a multitude of ways. The following section provides further elaboration on the theoretical lens for this project and how it can be utilized to examine the identity portrayed by wives and girlfriends of sports stars. This
section has three goals. First, social identity theory is reviewed with key terms and previous studies that have utilized it as a lens. Second, how digital media networks and online environments, such as Twitter, are being used to create new classifications of shared understanding about identity.

**Theoretical Perspective**

In order to analyze how partners of elite athletes manage their identity via the social network system (SNS) Twitter and how such identity management fits within both the outside world and pre-existing group memberships, it is appropriate to use social identity theory (SIT) as a lens.

Henri Tajfel and John Turner (1979) formulated social identity theory in the 1980s in an effort to explain how people have maintain a personal identity as well as a social identity. Personal identity relates to specific characteristics of an individual such as interests, abilities, or skills. Social identity comprises an individual's sense of identity (who he/she is) based on group categories of demographic classifications or organizational membership. More specifically, SIT is used to better comprehend the underlying psychological basis of inter-group discrimination (ingroup vs. out-group) (Tajfel, 1982). Group membership grants a feeling of belonging: “A oneness with or belongingness to the organization, where the individual defines him or herself in terms of the organization(s) of which he or she is a member,” (Fink, Parker, Brett, & Higgins, 2009, p. 143). In order to grasp social identity theory in its entirety, it is important to recognize the stages of social identity development, analyze the hypothesis spurring the theory, and discuss how the digital age has spawned a longing for realism and a sense of contact within group memberships.
**Developing Social Identity.** Social identity theory assumes that being grouped will inevitably lead to prejudice against another group which occurs in three stages: social categorization, social identification, and social comparison (Tajfel, 1982). Social categorization is the, “ordering of the social environment in terms of social categories, that is of groupings of persons in a manner which is meaningful to the subject,” (Tajfel, 1982, p. 69). Social identification is, “part of the individual’s self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the emotional significance attached to that membership” (Tajfel, 1982, p. 69). Individuals strive to create social comparisons to enhance the status of the group to which they hold membership to increase their own self-esteem, thus creating the “ingroup” (us) (Tajfel, 1982). Individuals will discriminate against other social groups categorizing the “out-group” (them) as inferior (Hogg et al., 1995). The theory also contends that group membership are a significant source in establishing self-esteem, a high need for most individuals (Turner, Brown, & Tajfel, 1979). By finding negative aspects to associate with the out-group, ingroup members further enhance their self-image. This, as Tajfel and Turner (1979) note, is the reason why an individual's sense of identity is defined not as "I" but as "we".

**Group Membership.** The initial hypothesis for social identity theory focuses on group membership, resulting in appearance of an ingroup and/or self-categorization and enhancement in a manner that discriminates out-groups while favoring the ingroup. Furthermore, individuals suppress their identities in favor of the group. To best illustrate this, Turner and Tajfel (1986) did a study entitled Minimal Group Studies. The study indicated that by individuals forming themselves as group members, it is enough to cause
favoritism within the ingroup and discrimination among out groups (Turner & Tajfel, 1986).

After social identity theory became more established, more scholars began to incorporate it into their studies involving sports affiliation of fans and its correlation with social psychological health. For example, a study was drafted to extend previous investigations by examining the relationship between team identification and the establishment (maintenance) of social connections. Data consisted of 177 high school students who confirmed their expectations that being able to identity with a high school football team was positively correlated with both social well-being and social connections (Wann, Waddill, Brasher, & Ladd, 2015). However, social connections were not found to arbitrate the relationship between identification and well-being, contrary to the team identification (Wann et al., 2015).

Inferences can be drawn from the minimal group studies example and team identification study example mentioned above with the current study. For example, social connections are linked to overall well-being. “Scientific evidence strongly suggests that this is a core psychological need, essential to feeling satisfied with one’s life,” (“What is social connection,” 2018, para.1). Individuals are driven to connect with one another. This drive is implanted in biological and evolutionary history. As aforementioned, it begins at birth. The relationships developed with caregivers has spawned effects that seem to reverberate throughout one’s lifespan. Furthermore, “scientists believe we are essentially wired to connect with other people because natural selection favored humans with a stronger propensity to care for their offspring and organize into groups,” (“What is social connection,” 2018, para.3). Furthermore, it is suggested that one’s well-being is correlated to the quality of social ties.
Social connections are sometimes called “social capital.” They are a valuable resource in life, creating moments of positivity and fun, provide support through good times and bad, and introduce one to new ideas and new people. By creating healthy connections, research promises a longer, happier, and more prosperous life. Some benefits of social connection revealed through current research are, “People who are very happy tend to be highly social and have strong relationships. Although strong social connections alone can’t guarantee happiness, it may be impossible to be very happy without them,” (“Why practice it,” 2018, para. 4). Another benefit is, “strong social ties keep memory sharp and may even protect from the onset of a cold.” (“Why practice it,” 2018, para 5).

**The Digital Age.** Social identity theory and its assumptions correlate with the context of reality TV and social identity because the channels used for social interaction and social influence are increasing and diversifying. The digital age has spurred a longing for realism and a sense of contact. These new channels portray virtual social groups and virtual identities with which the users can identify. Furthermore, reality TV allows for viewers to “vicariously experience the ‘real’ world through observation of others’ trials and tribulations” (Godlewski & Perse, 2010, p. 151). Viewers of reality programming are constantly shaping their understanding of their own worldview as well as the worldviews that are being portrayed by each passing moment of a show, conducting an internal dialog that influences their thinking (Weiland & Dunbar, 2016). Such justification is taken from the Uses and Gratifications theory that upholds audiences use media to satisfy psychological and social needs (Papacharissi & Mendelson, 2007). The effects reality TV has on social identity was tested with the MasterChef brand, as it has been credited with changing the attitudes and behavior of consumers (its audience). The study investigated if the success of the most popular show on Australian television may be credited, in part, to
social identification. Such behavior has previously been attributed to both their context-specific social identity and the individual’s stable identity attributes. Further, individuals will judge themselves and other group members on common and significant identity attributes. Therefore, the study explored which significant attributes in the viewers and contestants of MasterChef Australia may facilitate the social identification process to change consumer attitudes and behavior. The objectives of the study were investigated using a large-scale quantitative online questionnaire surveying MasterChef Australia 2010 viewers. Findings indicate that consumers of the MasterChef Australia brand socially identify with contestants, and identity, authenticity, and involvement may contribute to this process (Higgins, 2017). Viewers of the Masterchef Australia show vicariously experience through those competing on the show 1) what it would be like to compete on a cooking game show and in a sense compare their skill set in the kitchen to the competitors, and 2) envision the networking opportunities to arise from such an experience.

**Social Media Platform**

Digital environments are a significant piece to the construction of lived social and cultural worlds, spawning new categories of action and shared understanding (Couldry, 2012). Twitter and other social media platforms of the like offer users effective sites to investigate these types of large-scale change. Tweets (i.e., messages of 140 characters or less) can be viewed by almost anyone from anywhere, offering a strong sense of immediacy. Scholarship also suggests that being in the public eye has a panoptic effect on the ways in which people express themselves (Lugg, 2006; Tooms et al., 2010). "Foucault (1975) extended the concept of hegemony when he argued how institutions such as schools, prisons, and hospitals serve as mechanisms that produce and reproduce the power
structures of reality within a society,” (Tooms et al., 2010, p. 111). Foucault explicate how this process is accomplished by coining the phrase panoptic mechanism. Panoptics became an efficient means to regulate individuals in various large institutional settings (Lugg, 2006).

Third, and finally, technology continues to reshape our everyday habits. One-on-One interchanges are being replaced with electronic ones, thus causing the digital landscape to become more crowded. Real-time conversations via social media are replacing physical gatherings to talk about a previous night’s episode of a favorite TV show (“Live TV + Social Media = Engaged Viewers,” 2015). Thus, is seems reasonable to assume those who watch WAGs on TV are likely to follow the cast on Twitter.

According to the Nielsen global survey, “65% of global respondents still prefer to watch video programming live at its regularly scheduled time,” (“Live TV + Social Media = Engaged Viewers,” 2015, para. 2). Furthermore, “more than half of global respondents (53%) say they like to keep up with shows so they can join the conversation on social media, and nearly half (49%) say they watch live video programming more if it has a social media tie in,” (“Live TV + Social Media = Engaged Viewers,” 2015, para.2). “Forty-seven percent of global respondents say they engage with social media while watching video programming,” (“Live TV + Social Media = Engaged Viewers,” 2015, para.2). Well-designed experiences can not only make the viewing experience more enjoyable, but they maximize the time users spend interacting with brands, too. (“Live TV + Social Media = Engaged Viewers,” 2015). Furthermore, it is expected that the WAGs manage their identity on Twitter because a large part of the show’s audience has a Twitter account. According to the Pew Research Center, Twitter is used most among 18-29 year olds (Jackson, 2015).
Cantor (2015) found that out of the 762,000 WAGs viewers, 568,000 of them represent the 18-49 demographic. In sum, Twitter best satisfies this study’s focus on how individuals articulate a position in relation to others (i.e., hierarchy of relational status).

Social identity theory provides a useful lens to examine the phenomena under investigation in the current study, self and identity, because social interactions offer an someone a better understanding of who they are. Social roles and social interactions are considered inter-individual processes, in terms of how reflected appraisals from others contribute to the definition of self (Swann et al. 2000) or might help fulfill a generic need to belong (Baumeister & Leary 1995, Leary & Baumeister 2000). Social identity theory assists in illuminating the disparate conditions under which issues of individualism and identity are affected by the groups to which the wives belong. An important endowment to understanding issues of selfhood and identity is provided by the social identity approach, subsuming social identity theory (Tajfel 1978, Tajfel & Turner 1979). This theoretical framework emphasizes the interplay between social identity as a factor in implicating different aspects of the self and social contextual factors that either enhance or diminish the meaningfulness of personal and social identities. Given the paucity of the research, the following research question is advanced:

*RQ: How do wives, fiancées, and girlfriends of sportsman manage identity via the social medium platform of Twitter? Does the identity management reinforce or negate identities portrayed on the reality show WAGs?*

The proceeding sections of this project address the theoretical framework informing research methods used in this investigation. Specifically, the method section will
encompass a description of how the data will be analyzed using a direct content analysis. Directed content analysis is the appropriate type of content analysis since there are three apriori categories in place to guide the analysis and coding (Identity formed through self, identity formed through status of partner, and identity formed through media (show)). In employing a grounded theory approach, the data to be analyzed focus on the emerging themes and concepts as they relate to how the athletes’ wives, fiancées, and girlfriends manage their identity to be ingroup/outgroup (labeled as wives, independent women, etc.).
Chapter 3: Method

Procedure

In order to accurately examine and determine how female partners of sportsmen manage their identity via the social network system (SNS) Twitter and whether the identity management reinforces or negates identities (group memberships) portrayed on the reality show WAGs, a content analysis was conducted where textual data was coded and categorized. There exist three approaches to content analysis in the social sciences: conventional content analysis, summative content analysis, and directive content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). A conventional content analysis is frequently used when the researcher wants to describe a phenomenon and code it with intuitions that emerge when the analysis initially starts (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). This approach is used according to there being little research on the issue. A summative content analysis approach starts with the researcher identifying and numbering off certain words or phrases followed by an elaborate interpretation of their use (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Lastly, the directed content analysis approach is called on when an existing theory, prior research, and an existing coding scheme are backed by existing literature (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). The directed content analysis process begins with the researcher identifying key concepts as initial coding categories followed by a brief definition for each of the categories (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). For this particular study, because of the preexisting coding schemes in the literature, a directed content analysis was conducted.

The current directed content analysis was inspired by Morreale’s (2005) media content analysis of the hybrid makeover, game, and reality TV show “Faking it.” To review, Morreale (2005) engaged content analysis to study cultural configuration that
portrays the transformation of personal identity through performance. Morreale argues that the contents of the show intensify the link between consumer culture and the counterfeit of identity by proving that fulfillment comes from becoming, rather than having, a commodity. In the show, participants learn to perform new selves that are perceived as "better." “Faking It” simply displays the processes of fabrication whereby the self is created and is best understood through the logic of simulation rather than representation. The show was examined for common themes that are also relevant to the show WAGs. Thus, the same themes were used in the current study as an apriori framework to guide the coding. Specifically, the three coding categories, with consideration of social identity theory, germane to the current directed content analysis included: (1) Identity formed through self; (2) Identity formed through the status of one’s partner; and, (3) identity formed through media (the show). Oftentimes, a single locution corresponded to more than just one coding category. The first coding category used by Morreale, Identity formed through self-captured how the women used the chosen media platform, Twitter, to push personal identity and brand over association with their partner or reinforced how the show portrayed them if the show portrayed them as entrepreneurial, etc. The wife, former fiancée, or girlfriend appears as an independent agent (e.g., Ayesha Alexander/Curry vs. Mrs. Stephen Curry). Some subthemes in this category are if she had her own makeup brand, author, clothing line, etc. The purpose of this coding category is to repudiate the cultural form portraying the transcendence of personal identity through performance. Morreale (2005) argues that the contents of a reality documentary show escalate the relationship between consumer and the falsification of identity by teaching that fulfillment comes from becoming, rather than having, a commodity. Of interest will be if participants want to perform new selves that are perceived as "better" through the logic of simulation rather
than representation using Twitter. The second coding category, *Identity formed through status of partner* corresponded to how the wife, former fiancée, and girlfriend living vicariously through the status of the sportsman. In other words, the wife, former fiancée, and girlfriend are recognized solely or primarily for being “so-and so’s” wife, fiancée, or girlfriend. Some subthemes in this category are if there was an association with the partner with a commodity (ie: car, jewelry), the couple was attending an awards show that you have to be invited to go to, etc. The final coding category, *Identity formed through media (the show)* was executed similarly to the theme from Morreale’s (2005) content analysis. Specifically highlighted was how the media portrayed the three women as “scripted”. In other words, their identity is reflective of how the media wants them to be portrayed in order to keep show ratings high (e.g., the producers’ portrayals of the women are consistent with the women’s identity formation in the Twitter sphere). Subthemes in this category are if the WAG replied to the original Tweet either agreeing or disagreeing with how they were portrayed on the episode, a tweet about the WAG came from the WAG (producer) Twitter account, etc. That is, the women’s Tweets that are aligned with this category reinforce the show’s portrayal of them.

**Sample**

The sample for the current investigation is a random sample systematically pulled from the personal Twitter accounts of three WAGs over the course of the first two seasons. Of consideration is that the show’s portrayal of the women and their identities are largely at the hand of the show’s producers. Second, and more focused on the women taking personal control of their identities (the units of analyses for the current investigation are the women’s Tweets), with focus on how identity is personally managed by the WAGs.
Twitter is the chosen platform for the investigation for myriad reasons. To begin, the World Wide Web has managed to entice the attention of research communities (Comley, 2008; Dwivedi et al., 2008; Zwass, 1996). In particular, the significant role of analyzing social media networks to advance societal comprehension of information sharing, (Averya et al., 2010; Chiu et al., 2006; Turri et al., 2013), and opinion formation has been recognized (Abrahams et al., 2012; Airoldi et al., 2006; Bai, 2011; Jansen et al., 2011; Lane et al., 2012). Given this investigation focuses on social identity, the Twitter platform and subsequent Tweets enable the notion of identity to be created, managed and reified (through text, photo, verbiage, or a combination of all three) not only to the message’s creator, but to the audience. Alternative platforms, such as Facebook, can require that one be a “friend” to have access to the information, depending on how the account’s accessibility is constructed. Like Twitter, anyone can follow an individual on Instagram, but whereas Twitter’s focus is language, Instagram’s focus is photographs. Although both social media platforms offer a different purpose to users they have grown closer in association. One reason for this is the sudden notice they received from an advertiser group, Association of National Advertisers (ANA) demanding they adopt independent audits. The second reason pertains to attaining the shared goal of increased web presence (Sloane, 2017). In order to achieve this goal Instagram CEO Kevin Systrom and Twitter CEO Jack Dorsey have made the option of sharing a public Instagram post to Twitter available to users. Users just need to verify that both accounts have been linked (Aciman, 2015).

Given the current investigation considers how identity and status are created, maintained, and reified via communication forms (language and nonverbally through photos and videos), Twitter is an appropriate platform of focus because it allows for
instantaneous text with attendant visual components if so chosen by the Tweeter (e.g., a short message with/without an accompanying photograph or video). Specifically, Twitter affords brief (< 140 characters [at the time of this investigation]) status updates (“Tweets”) users share with “followers” (e.g., thoughts, feelings, activities, opinions) contain a wealth of data. Lengthy following allows for an easier time being able to identify modifications in opinions and/or responses. Twitter is known for building engagement outside of the social network. For other SNS’s, such as Instagram, social media engagement starts and finishes in the app. On one hand, Twitter is geared towards creating engagement outside of the app by getting users to Tweet links to content on a website or other platform. This is a good segue into the next point, functionality. Twitter is essentially a content distribution tool. Twitter does not keep you within the app, like Instagram, as it allows users to follow what is going on in real time and share links and live updates. The Twitter format is a good fit for the sample (the three WAGs and units of analyses), Although one might choose to regularly tune in or follow another user, doing so, is not requisite to being able to view one another’s Tweets.

In sum, social media content is widely accessible, up-to-date, and available in electronic format, thus enabling individuals—including the WAGs—to manage their identities. A systematic approach enables public entities to understand the commonality in various online text data that appear in social media (Karimov et al., 2011). By using the information garnered from social media, researchers can gain valuable insights into the utility of user-generated content and trust formation (Karimov et al., 2011; Kim et al., 2012; Wang & Li, 2014). As a result, marketers can better track how users perceive social networks and aid organizations in strategic planning. Specific to this study, individuals are,
in a sense, marketing themselves, enabling one to consider identity construction in the media and its potential impact on the audience.

The three WAGs comprising the sample for the current directed content analysis are Natalie Halcro, Autumn Ajirotutu, and Ashley North. Natalie Halcro is the former fiancée of NFL linebacker Shaun Phillips. Autumn Ajirotutu is the wife of current NFL free agent Seyi Ajirotutu. Ashley North is the girlfriend to NFL safety Dashon Goldson. These three women were chosen for this investigation because they are staple and seminal to the show. Specifically, two out of the three women have starred on the show since first airing on E! network on August 18, 2015. Ashley North appeared all of season one, but was a guest on season two. Also, this population of interest offers more ethnic and/or racial diversity and diversity in relational status (i.e., girlfriend, fiancée, and wife). A more representative sample is provided with these three women, thus potentially fortifying either that identity mirrors cultural roots (identity formed through self) or one identifies with others in a way that allows them to better “fit in” (identity formed through status of self and media). All three women have a significant amount of followers on Twitter. Natalie Halcro has 81,900 followers, Autumn Ajirotutu has 10,600 followers, and Ashley North has 6,930 followers. Random sampling of the personal Twitter accounts occurred for every nth Tweet over the course of two seasons of the show.

As aforementioned, the reality show WAGs was chosen for the current investigation as it provides a more varied population type. Whereas other reality documentary television shows in the sports’ world such as Hockey Wives and Basketball Wives chronicle the personal and professional lives of wives of elite athletes, WAGs is inclusive as it offers diverse relationship types (e.g. wives, fiancées, and girlfriends). Furthermore, WAGs is more racially diverse than Hockey Wives or Basketball Wives. Because the purpose of the
present study is to discern identity themes, the three Twitter accounts being examined over the course of two seasons will focus on either identity formed through self, status of the wife, or the media.

**Procedures**

To best ensure objectivity, systematic sampling of the sample’s Tweets was exercised. Systematic sampling with every “nth” Tweet was deemed appropriate for three reasons. First, the amount of Tweets posted by all three participants in the sample have a known and equal chance of being selected (objectivity). The Tweets are posted in a systematic order according to date within the sampling frame (August 18, 2015-September 25, 2016), thereby, providing a greater degree of control and a sense of process over the content analysis. Second, systematic sampling imposes the most objectivity possible, thus reducing the potential of salacious or provocative Tweets from being intentionally selected. Lastly, every nth Tweet is influenced by how often the three women Tweet. Specifically, there is a disproportionate number of Tweets among the three women; thus, choosing too wide of an interval might result in poorer representation of a woman who does not Tweet as often. Conversely, enacting too tight of a sampling frame could exhaust the total number of Tweets for a particular woman in the final sample before the second season is covered. The subset of Tweets randomly sampled from the sampling frame will be used to evaluate how the women create an identity about themselves through the language they use.

Specifically, as aforementioned and as elaborated upon below, every 6th Tweet for a less frequent Tweeter and every 20th Tweet for a frequent Tweeter was pulled to cross-compare: 1) if how the wife of a professional athlete identifies is different in comparison to that of a fiancée and/or girlfriend; 2) how the identity displayed relates to the
ultimate goal of the show which is to get the ring (and keep it); 3) ingroup vs outgroup comparisons between WAGs and non-WAGs (if applicable); and, 4) hierarchical group differences within the WAGs due to the sports’ athletes’ status (if applicable). Every 6th and 20th Tweet were chosen because they reflected the timeframe between August 18, 2015-September 25, 2016. The reason these anchor point dates were designated to begin and end the sampling timeframe is because the points best coincide with the seasons. The current season hadn't started yet when this project began, so the author focused on what had already aired and the Tweets that were available. Another factor that served as a decision rule for sample inclusion was that every nth Tweet had to encompass text, a video, photo, retweet, or a combination thereof. Videos, photos, and retweets were considered because the women are using these forms of communication to create, maintain and reify/reinforce their identity. So, for example, an nth tweet that shows a pic of a giant ring or piece of jewelry, maybe with a caption, that reinforces any of the three codes (i.e., my wife is rich, or a wedding ring, or etc.) or warrants that a new code be created. The goal of this study involved examining how forms of communication are used to create, maintain, and reify identity. Another reason for every 6th and 20th Tweet being chosen emphasizes once more the notion that every nth Tweet is influenced by how often the three women Tweet. Natalie Halcro Tweeted 1,157 times within the timeframe; Autumn Ajirotutu Tweeted 356 times within the timeframe; and, Ashley North Tweeted 350 times within the timeframe. Thus, the 20th Tweet (Natalie Halcro) and 6th Tweet (Autumn Ajirotutu and Ashley North), respectively, represent an attempt at sample proportionality (approximately 57-59 Tweets total per woman) and was imposed at the onset of the study. Also taken into consideration what within each Tweet/unit of analysis, multiple coding units were a possibility that could apply to any of the a priori coding categories. That is, within one 140-character Tweet, one
of the women, for example could make mention of her brand, being so-and-so’s partner, and/or make comment about how the show was portraying them. When a Tweet was encountered that did not meet the aforementioned inclusion criteria, the author moved on to the Tweet under it, used it, then counted six from there (or 20, depending on the woman) and so on.

**Data Analysis**

First, review/synopsis of the three spotlighted women from the show’s two seasons was provided to offer background about the women. Of consideration is that the show’s portrayal of the women and their identities is largely at the hand of the show’s producers. Second, and more focused on the women taking personal control of their identities, the units of analyses for the current investigation are the women’s Tweets, with attention on how identity is personally managed by the WAGs. A roster of episodes for the two seasons were printed and all episodes were viewed by the Researcher for context to be taken into consideration with attendant Tweets. After all of the Tweets over the course of the first two seasons for the three women in the sample were gathered from Twitter and printed in hard copy, the coding process was initiated.

Being a directed content analysis, the researcher exploited the three categories that were previously mentioned (*Identity formed through self, Identity formed through status of partner, and Identity formed through show (media)*) as a guiding framework. Each of the Tweets were coded with the researcher’s own handwriting, and highlighted word by word. The first step in the coding process was to glance through all of the Tweets as a whole. After that, the author took notes about first initial responses. Once that was complete, the author carefully re-read the Tweets once again, one by one. This process enabled the author to familiarize herself with the content and “feel” of the Tweets (Schilling, 2006).
Additional justification for multiple passes is to prevent, “drifting into an idiosyncratic sense of what the codes mean,” (Schilling, 2006, p.33). Next, the author went through each Tweet and highlighted different coding units each Tweet contained in different colors, with each color representing one of the three a priori themes. Specifically, the color pink will indicate theme (1), yellow will indicate theme (2), and orange will indicate theme (3). This process included labeling relevant subthemes that related to the priori codes. For example, if certain phrases rang prominent in the Tweets because they correspond to a specific category, such as the WAG tagging their significant other in a Tweet giving thanks to the new car they were bought, it was circled and labeled as “Identity/Partner.” This process was repeated and revisited until the author felt certain and comfortable with each coding category and each coding decision. After the first round of coding, the author revisited the data to carefully re-analyze each Tweet and recode the Tweets for a second round. After the second round, the author’s decisions for coding slightly changed compared to the first round. This led the author to re-code each Tweet again for another round. Compared to the previous rounds, the author’s coding for the fourth round demonstrated the advancement of the process and the author’s deep immersion into the data. The author reviewed the coding changes for the third round and re-read each category once again. This led the author to include the third round of coding as the final result of the coding process.

With each Tweet analyzed, and attendant coding unit(s) within, the author then addressed each coding unit within the Tweet as it/they relate(s) to the context of the episode that aired if appropriate/applicable. Specifically, cross comparisons are appropriate and applicable between any given Tweet on the cusp of an aired episode. After coding the entire data set, the consistency of the coding was rechecked. It can be assumed that, if a sample was coded in a consistent and reliable manner, the coding of the whole corpus of
text is also consistent (Miles & Huberman, 1994). That said, human coders are subject to
fatigue and are likely to make more mistakes as the coding proceeds. Also, the coders’
understanding of the categories and coding rules may change subtly over the time, which
may lead to greater inconsistency (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Weber, 1990). Thus, an
intercoder reliability check was enacted to address coding consistency and is elaborated
upon below.

After coding was completed for each Tweet, the researcher counted each category
and labeled the frequency for each category on the top of the page. When the coding was
completed for each page and the frequency was reported for each one separately, the
researcher went back and double checked the frequency for the articles to ensure
consistency. The researcher transferred the frequency of coding category for each category
by date into an Excel sheet, where the total for each category was added and double
checked once again.

After the data were coded and reviewed again to ensure confidence for their
placement in their respective categories, an independent coder unaware of the nature of the
study, was trained by the researcher using the coding rubric. The independent coder coded
a random 20% of the content using the coding rubric, thereby serving as a reliability check
for the study. In order to ensure a random 20% was used for the reliability check, a random
number between 1 and 10 was chosen and utilized to pull the Tweets. Specifically, the
number five (5) was randomly pulled; thus, every fifth Tweet was extracted for each WAG
until the author satisfied a random 20%. After the first coding past, there existed six
coding agreement discrepancies between the author/researcher and the independent coder
which were discussed, clarified and recoded. After the second discussion, agreement across
all categories was met with 100%, κ = 1.00 (Cohen’s Kappa). After all of the coding
criteria were considered and all data coded, the final tally of codes for analysis were: 22
total observed coding units for Natalie Halcro (Former Fiancée); 53 total observed coding
units for Autumn Ajirotutu (Wife); and, 42 total observed coding units for Ashley North
(Girlfriend). Results of the coding and attendant analyses appear in the following chapter.
Chapter 4: Results and Interpretation

The research question(s) guiding this investigation asked, “How do wives, fiancées, and girlfriends of sportsman manage identity via the social medium platform of Twitter? Does the identity management reinforce or negate identities portrayed on the reality show WAGs? Initially, and as reported in the Method, 1863 Tweets among the three women were posted on Twitter within the sampling frame. From the population of Tweets within that timeframe, a sample of 175 Tweets met the criteria of every 6th and 20th Tweet and meeting the sample inclusion criteria. Cumulatively, coding for this investigation yielded 117 coding units that met the criteria for inclusion: 22 total observed coding units for Natalie Halcro (Former Fiancée); 53 total observed coding units for Autumn Ajirotutu (Wife); and, 42 total observed coding units for Ashley North (Girlfriend), respectively. To test the research question a 3 X 3 (relational status = girlfriend, fiancé, wife) X (identification via Tweet type = identification via self, identification via partner, identification via media portrayal) chi square test of independence was conducted and the result is nonsignificant, $X^2 (4) = 7.848, p < .09$. Overall cell frequencies and attendant percentages are presented below in Table 1.
In reviewing the various cells, despite the nonsignificant result, some frequency differentials within strategy types exist. Second, results are to be interpreted with some caution given two of the cells hold < 5 units per cell. Given that, additional analyses were conducted to examine if engagement within each of the identification strategy types/Tweets distributionally varied within each relational status. Results of the additional analyses demonstrated that women’s engagement in self-promotion strategies significantly, distributionally differed based on relational status, $\chi^2(2) = 13.8, p < .001$. Specifically, an examination of cells indicates that the wife engaged in the most self-promotion, followed by the girlfriend, and lastly, the former fiancée. Among the partner identity strategies, distributional differences were nonsignificant among the three relational types, $\chi^2(2) =$
4.75, p < .09. These results should also be interpreted with some caution given two of the three cells hold < 5 units. Finally, results indicate that identity via media portrayal is not distributionally different, $X^2(2) = .22, p < .89$. That is, women, regardless of relational status, Tweeted about their identity per the show WAGs similarly.

In sum, and to aid in understanding the entire picture, it is likely best to examine the women’s’ representations in percentages rather than numeric value. The WAG that highlighted the *Identity formed through self*-most frequently was wife Autumn, with 70% of her coded Tweets within the sampling frame fitting this category. *Identity formed through status of partner* was most frequently exercised by girlfriend Ashley with a total of 12%. The *Identity formed through media* (producers) most frequently engaged, again, by girlfriend Ashley (26%). Examples from the various coded Tweets demonstrating the various identity formations are now offered.

**Natalie (Former Fiancée)**

*Identity formed through self* ($n = 11, 50\%$). Of all categories considered and coded, Natalie’s Tweets falling within the sampling frame for this investigation were coded similarly between this category and *Identity formed through media* (producers). When considering the Tweets for inclusion in Natalie’s portion of the sample, none of her Tweets appeared to display her identity as formed through her partner. Examples from Natalie’s coded data illustrating *Identity formed through self*-include, using Re-Tweeted phrases such as, “I just watched @nataliehalcro’s highlighting tutorial. Laughed my ass of when @oliviapierson made that slap,” (Mojiun, 2015). An example of when Natalie displayed *identity formed through self and media (producers)* is when she Re-Tweeted a viewer’s Tweet that said, “@nataliehalcro is absolutely my fav WAG! Love what she represents:
independence, girl power, & a good time…& still in a relationship #WAGs,” (Wilson, 2015). This Tweet corresponds with the episode titled “For love or money.” In this episode, Natalie is challenged with choosing between her career and her relationship with Shaun (her fiancé). Natalie started making a name for herself at a young age as a model. Natalie has endorsed brands such as Old Navy, Nissan, and Mazda, Natalie is also an Internet phenomenon, a YouTuber with strong recognition, given her make-up and hair tutorials on her YouTube channel ‘Nat+Liv’ have garnered more than a million views. The channel itself has a subscriber base of more than 240,000. Natalie now runs a fashion blog ‘Jerome’ with her cousin Olivia Pierson, which eventually led to the demise of Natalie and Shaun’s relationship, given that Natalie appeared to choose her career over love.

**Identity formed through status of partner** (*n = 0, 0%*). When considering every nth Tweet that was analyzed for Natalie within the sampling frame, no Tweets met the criteria of a **Identity formed through status of partner**. It could be assumed that Natalie is unsure of her status with her partner in the first place since their time together on the show was cut short after she was forced to choose between love and her career.

**Identity formed through media (producers)** (*n = 11, 50%*). As discussed previously, Natalie’s posted Tweets within the sampling frame were split between this category and the **Identity formed through self**-category. It can be concluded from the data that how the media portrayed Natalie on the show is accurate given many of her independent Tweets reinforce rather than challenge the show’s portrayal of her. The “scripted” identity is reflective and consistent with how she chooses to identity within the social media sphere. An example of when Natalie displayed this categorization of identity is when she Re-Tweeted a viewer’s Tweet which states, “#WAGs is my guilty pleasure.
Make me beautiful, @nataliehalcro @OliviaPierson,” (Delight, 2015). This Tweet exemplifies that this particular viewer sees Natalie’s beauty as being a byproduct of the show. This viewer’s Tweet also suggests an impressionability, perhaps implying that to be adored by others, one must or should look like what is portrayed on television. Also worthy of note is that by Natalie Re-Tweeting this viewer’s Tweet, Natalie is reinforcing this sentiment. Of interest is what cache the viewer is pulling from Natalie in terms of “making her beautiful.” Given Natalie’s sampled Tweets during the timeframe focused on herself as a brand or the show’s portrayal of her, one can only speculate that the viewer looked to Natalie as a businesswoman or entrepreneur to make her beautiful or, perhaps, wishes for the beautiful life that she believes Natalie has, as portrayed on the show.

Another Tweet that exemplifies this category is a Re-Tweet that says,

“@nataliehalcro Don’t take this the wrong way but you’re THICK! I’m little and thick, & it’s refreshing to see girls like you on TV! Go girl!,” (Tian, 2015). This Tweet represents what is known as “entertainment education.” “Entertainment education is designed to both educate and entertain, intentionally, weaving important health and social issues into powerful storytelling that draws in viewers,” (“What is entertainment education?”, 2018, para. 1). The mass media is enthralled with being able to affect how people think and the topic they are most concerned with. People aren’t able to disregard what entertainment media has to show because the scenarios seem too real. (Singhal & Rogers, 1999). In order for an entertainment show or commercial to be this effective, “the audience must identify in some way with the characters and what they are doing, even if some aspects of the situation are ‘unrealistic,’” (“What is Entertainment Education,” 2018, para. 2). This particular viewer sees Natalie, not as simulated, but as someone they identify with and connect with. The viewer sees themselves as being a little bit “thicker” in stature, perhaps, but still a great
person. Natalie has stated several times that she is not like the other girl’s body image wise, but nonetheless supports her own body. This sentiment will be elucidated in the Discussion as it relates to the implications concerning reality stars and their platform to affect the identity of others (e.g., positive body image, etc.) and the potential implications on viewer impressionability.

**Autumn (Wife)**

*Identity formed through self (n = 37, 70%).* Findings demonstrate that Autumn’s Tweets primarily met the coding criteria for this category. In fact, out of all three women’s Tweets examined for the purposes of this investigation, Autumn appeared to engage in this type of identification most for the Tweets examined within the sampling frame. Some example Tweets from Autumn demonstrating this type of identification are elucidated. “Money can buy you a lot of things in life, but one thing it can’t buy is good integrity. Good, bad indifferent own it. Learn from it and grow,” (Ajirotutu, 2016). This is a Tweet Autumn pushed out in response to a lesson she learned from a previous episode. In the previous episode, Autumn is portrayed as acting like she is better than anyone else given she is on the top of the hierarchy with a wedding ring. The Tweet attendant to that episode says, “For the record I do not feel this way. Only a few of my best friends are married nor do I feel I’m better than any1,” (Ajirotutu, 2016). Autumn seems to be defending herself based on how the show (producers) displayed her on an episode. Although she claims her actions were over-dramatized, her defense might have come a bit too late considering impressionable viewers and how quick they often are to accept what they see the first time. For example, one viewer Tweeted, “I honestly strongly dislike @AutumnAjirotutu on @WAGsonE she’s so condescending, stuck up, and rude,” (Lupe, 2016). Another viewer
Tweeted “@AutumnAjirotutu I get it girl but everyone doesn’t feel the way you do. You hurt her feelings. You should apologize,” (22 Savage, 2016). Autumn later replied, “I did. But they didn’t show you that,” (Ajirotutu, 2016). It can be inferred that Autumn is placing sole responsibility of her actions on the producers, claiming that they displayed a side of her to the viewers that was not accurate. One could possibly assume, like one impressionable viewer did, that the producers, “…have to create a villain so they edit @WAGsonE to make @AutumnAjirotutu seem mean on purpose,” (Smith, 2016).

Another Tweet that fits this category is, “Hi Guys! I launched My food blog today…With a little bit of lifestyle! Go check it out,” (Ajirotutu, 2016). Here Autumn appears to be self-promoting her own brand and making her blog’s availability known to viewers, encouraging their traffic to the site. Autumn also Tweeted out, “Obsessed with our children’s clothing line,” (Ajirotutu, 2015). Again, it seems as if she is self-promoting her brand of clothing particularly for young children and encourages traffic to the “Wittle One” website.

Identity formed through status of partner (n = 3, .06%). Of the three categories, Autumn personally posted Tweets that least engaged and/or reinforced this type of identity formation. Specifically, the data portrays that that Autumn holds a lot of the power in the relationship. For example, a viewer Tweeted, “@AutumnAjirotutu that’s not cool that she got on you about her man acting like an idiot. She should have checked him #WAGs,” (Brasileira, 2015). Autumn replied with, “Period! I wish he would try cussing me out,” (Ajirotutu, 2015). There seems to be an unbalanced power dynamic in Autumn and Sey’s relationship despite the fact that Seyi does earn more money. One could postulate that even if Seyi did buy Autumn the most lavish car, house, as Autumn Tweeted earlier, “Money can’t buy you integrity,” (Ajirotutu, 2016). Autumn makes sure to let her integrity shine as
she continues to promote her own brand and using the show as a platform to be able to do so. An example of Autumn being more concerned with promoting her own brand and not her identity as related to the status of her partner is when she responds to a viewer Tweet saying, “Riding for my husband till the end! He’s so amazing, he makes it easy,” (Ajirotutu, 2015). It can be implied from this Tweet that Autumn is able to promote her cooking recipes and knows that her husband supports her 100%. A viewer might also speculate that her husband “makes it easy” for her to promote her brand and focus on her work because she might not have the stress of being a primary breadwinner—that is, by virtue of her husband’s career, she is afforded the luxury of being able to explore and pursue a variety of options. Autumn, compared to Natalie, is not hesitant when it comes to promoting herself. “My center of validation is to not be married. But I love my husband and grateful I found my happily ever after when I did,” (Ajirotutu, 2015). One interpretation of this displayed comfort might be that Autumn already has what Natalie was working toward, “the ring.”

*Identity formed through media (producers) (n = 13, 25%).* Of the three women examined in this investigation, Autumn engaged in identity formation through media second most frequently. However, it was not significant enough to be able to claim that, similar to Natalie’s Tweets where the media played just as much of a role in her identity formation as did her own self, Autumn validated how the media displayed her only about a quarter of the time. Overall, 25% of Autumn’s Tweets within the sampling frame met the criteria of this category. An example of this category is when Autumn Re-Tweeted a Tweet pushed out by the show’s account and reads, “#WAGs have to be the backbone for their athletes. @AutumnAjirotutu is so strong,” (WAGS on E, 2015). This Tweet symbolizes a life lesson the show appears to be trying to filter out to its viewers, which is that WAGs are
expected to be there for their partners at all times. That is, when times get tough, the show’s Tweet suggests (and Autumn reinforces through her Retweet), that the WAG is expected to pick up the pieces. Autumn Re-Tweeting the Tweet suggests that she intends to “stand by her man” through thick and thin.

Another example is a Tweet that was Re-Tweeted saying, “I honestly strongly dislike @AutumnAjirotutu on @WAGsonE she’s so condescending, stuck up and rude,” (Lupe, 2016. Autumn replied by saying, “Negative,” (Ajirotutu, 2016). Autumn’s response indicates that she was not happy with how she was portrayed on the show. Here she is in clear opposition with what the viewer said and is trying to figure out how to best combat this. Another instance of Autumn feeling disgruntled with media portrayal of her character is another Re-Tweet and comment by Autumn. The Tweet said, “@AutumnAjirotutu I get it girl but everyone doesn’t feel the same way you do. You hurt her feelings. You should apologize,” (22 Savage, 2016). Autumn replied saying, “I did. But they didn’t show you that,” (Ajirotutu, 2016). This is another instance of Autumn being depicted one type of way in the media and now having to recover face.

Ashley (Girlfriend)

Identity formed through self (n = 26, 62%). Similarly to Natalie and Autumn, this category was most represented by Ashley. Similar to Natalie, Ashley is still trying to find herself. That is, she appears to be wanting to remove herself from being boxed in on the show, but at the same time, not wanting to cross over boundaries and risk what appeared to happen to Natalie (i.e. getting the engagement ring, but not the wedding ring). A Tweet that best encapsulates this is when Ashley Re-Tweeted, “Be strong and courageous, do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go. Joshua 1:9,” (Sovereign Apparel, 2015). The author of the quote is Shawn Migliaccio. He
created the brand fusing conviction and passion. A week prior to having Re-Tweeted that Tweet a viewer Tweeted, “OK time out time out…Ashley slow down boo @WAGsonE.” (Bacchus, 2015). In the attendant episode Ashley appears to be getting impatient with Dashon and discouraged by the status of their relationship. She feels they are taking a couple steps backward in their relationship since he has not yet proposed. With Ashley being “just the girlfriend,” she potentially has more to risk compared to Natalie, for example, who had the engagement ring, but has not yet reached that status of being a “wife.” However, with the encouraging words offered by viewers such as, “@AshleyNorth you are such a sweetheart it’s a good thing when a man doesn’t do it before he’s ready respect his truth it will pay off,” (Wilson, 2015). Ashley is better able to focus on promoting her own brand and not risk the relationship taking any other steps backward. An example of Ashley attempting to promote her own branding without crossing the threshold is her Re-Tweeting a Tweet that said, “#Repost @kevinhart4real…Photo shoot fresh…Shot by @brianbowensmith & Styled by @ashleynorth,” (Smith, 2015). This Tweet illustrates Ashley is attempting to brand herself as a stylist. She establishes credibility with having notable actor and comedian Kevin Hart tagged on the post. However, the threshold maintains a virtual presence because she is not commenting on the Tweet, just sharing it. She is basically branding herself through the initiative of others.

Identity formed through status of partner (n = 5, 12%). Of the three categories examined in this investigation this type of identity formation is the one Ashley engaged in least frequently. Similar to Autumn, it appears that Ashley was more concerned with promoting her own brand and using the show as a platform to be able to do so. However, similar to Natalie, there are times when Ashley is hesitant when it comes to promoting
herself because (as previously discussed), Ashley as the girlfriend has a lot more to lose when considering the mantra of the show WAGs as well as her own personal relationship. An example of this is, “A man needs a woman with vision. Men who want to be great will except [sic] u to push them & invest in them. @WAGs onE #WAGs,” (North, 2015). This Tweet demonstrates the reciprocal nature of Ashley and Dashon’s relationship. Dashon’s status as a starting football player is supported with the backing he receives from Ashley. At the same time, Ashley received her breakthrough in the public eye largely due to Dashon’s status as a professional athlete and being connected to him. It is unknown if Ashely’s career as a stylist would have provided her with as much fame as being a WAG.

Another example is, “Such an awesome week at the PAO conference! the increase Can’t wait for next year!!” (North, 2016). This Tweet revolves around the status of the partner because the PAO conference mission is to bring pro athletes and couples together to grow as followers of Jesus and impact their spheres of influence in positive ways (‘Pro athletes outreach,’ 2018). This opportunity would have not been possibly if it weren’t for Ashley’s boyfriend’s status as a professional athlete. Another reason demonstrating how This Tweet relates to this category is that Ashley mentions “the increase.” This alludes to salary and her hoping that each year there is an increase in her boyfriend/partner’s paycheck.

Identity formed through media (n = 11, 26%). Identity formed through media was the second most frequently engaged category for Ashley. What can be suggested from the findings is that Ashley appears validate the show’s portrayal of her approximately 25% of the time (in the Tweets coded). An example reflecting this category is illustrated when Ashley Tweeted a Tweet pushed out by the show’s account and reads, “Sometimes a drink or two is necessary when conversation topics get touchy,” (WAGS on E, 2015). This Tweet
symbolizes a past time a population of the public might be able to relate to on a regular basis. What Re-Tweeting that Tweet suggests is that, when under stress, Ashley might indulge and/or reinforce support for having a drink or two.

Another example illustrating this category is when Ashley Re-Tweets a Tweet that says, “@AshleyNorth TV is such a tiny glimpse into your lives Ash. The years you’ve been together alone speak volume for the bond the 2 of u have,” (Crooks, 2015). This Tweet pertains to this category because the media blew up a small event that had to do with Ashley and her boyfriend. Specifically, the couple got in a fight in the episode and the media took off with it. Viewers missed the point and thought the fight was real. Thus, as a result, Ashley and her boyfriend made a vow that if they were mad at each other, then the situation would be attended to accordingly. This Tweet seems to be embracing the same sentiment shared by Natalie to viewers to disregard everything they see because the media loosely stages simulations of reality, which can be considered with Morreale’s (2005) arguments about simulation and identity.
Chapter 5: Discussion

The purpose of this investigation was twofold in nature. Specifically, this study aimed to examine whether or not wives, fiancées, and girlfriends of sportsmen create, manage, and reify their identity via the social medium platform of Twitter. The second purpose was to examine if the identity managed reinforces or negates the identity portrayed on the reality show WAGs. The results indicate a non-significant difference among the three women and coding categories beyond chance for some aspects of the investigation. Additional analyses with each, respective WAG also illuminate that there exists a significant difference between the observed framing of identity and what might be theoretically expected in the case of identity management through the self-identify formation. The findings of this investigation can be considered as they might affect viewers’ body image, impressions of strong women, entrepreneurship, independence, etc. while at the same time trying to maintain a high profile relationship.

Everyone has an identity, which is how one perceives their roles in society in relation to others. Social position, culture, ethnicity, interests, achievements, or beliefs help one to derive a sense of pride, self-worth, and consistency from social identities. Social identities were displayed on WAGs and what might have been gleaned by viewers is that the WAGs feel a sense of pride, self-worth, and consistency with the WAG hierarchy they belong to.

Within the literature, the utilization of social media as a tool for examining identity created, managed, and reified, specifically within relationships involving a professional athlete and encircled by a hierarchy, appears to be a road less travelled. Particularly, a paucity of previous research focuses on more contemporary identity formation involving the
intersectionality between adulthood, family history, and peer relationships. The past couple of years, nonetheless, have been marked by more published pieces concerning the various developmental processes that occur in young adulthood and the role of cultural orientation in identity and intimacy development among emerging adults, which has not been prominent in scholarly research (Jhingon, 2012).

When social identity theory was created, Tajfel was interested in how group memberships can help people to instill meaning in social situations (Ellemers, Spears & Doosje, 2002). In other words, it is aimed at connecting cognitive processes with behavioral motivation (e.g. Cialdini, Borden, Thorne, Walker, Freeman, & Sloan, 1976). That said, social identity scholars incorporated minimal group studies to show that categorizing individuals into groups is sufficient enough to make one feel as if they are a part of it all (Ellemers et al., 2002). That finding deviates from the similar view that an objective conflict of interest is a central factor in the emergence of intergroup conflict (Ellemers et al., 2002). According to Abraham Maslow, people categorize themselves because evolution has educated them that it is in their best interest to live in tribes, where one can share out the work of daily survival (“The need for a sense of identity,” 2018). Maslow also argues that some individuals place a greater emphasis on group identity. Their sense of identity is crafted through taking a part of everyone with who they bond and adding it to their own sense of self. In this way, the self becomes a complex, multiple, social being (“The need for a sense of identity,” 2018).

The show has a tendency to brand the women to think of themselves and others in terms of group membership instead of as separate individuals. The acronym WAG is an appellation that underlines the women’s status as adjuncts to their husbands, fiancées, and
boyfriends: accessories, appendages, etc. Thus, impressionable viewers could possibly view the women as being defined by their male counterpart and that marriage is seen as a career path for them. In other words, “It’s like the 18-th or early 19-th century idea of the woman being given value by her relationship with the man, and the more successful he is, the more valuable she is,” (Cochrane, 2010, para.9). Impressionable viewers seek a positive message and the message they seem to be receiving from reality documentary shows like WAGs is that the pinpointing appeal of marrying an athlete is money (Cochrane, 2010). Also, the busy lives of WAGs’ tends to bring to mind a sort of 1950s womanhood documented in a “handbook” that is expected to be followed. The WAGs must come upon demand, stay away when they’re not wanted, face isolation, and experience the fear that another woman may be waiting in the wings ready to take their place (Cochrane, 2010). Therefore, from a social standpoint most people would probably be turned off by what this show and what the project seeks to find. Impressionable viewers currently see those on reality television as being more ornament than instrument.

However, it was found that these WAGs don’t abide by the “handbook” they are conditioned to follow in order to be on reality television and be happy. Rather, at least within the coded Tweets within the sampling frame considered for this analysis, the women appear to retaliate against these “kept” notions and, instead, promote individual branding. This generation of WAGs appear to be more entrepreneurial and focused on bettering themselves. It does seem that there is a WAG acknowledgement and pride there. That they recognize their membership, but they champion being a model or stylist or businesswoman over being so and so’s partner. That all said, and as previously acknowledged, it could be that the WAG membership in the first place afforded them the platform and launching pad to explore personal business ventures. A previously mentioned example was Ashley where
the chances of her being as well-known as a stylist prior to her WAG ingroup membership would be low. The findings of this investigation provide important contributions to the different implications about the show. In this case, considered are stories involving issues of power and individuality. The current study supports previous research on the way someone chooses to identify and expel it to the public (e.g. Cialdini, Borden, Thorne, Walker, Freeman, & Sloan, 1976; Jhingon, 2012; Schwartz, Donnellan, Ravert, Luyckx, & Zamboanga, 2012).

Summary of Findings

As the research demonstrates, the WAGs choose to identify in a way that mirrors their values, thoughts, idea, and interest of others. That show’s branding and the trailers themselves (https://vimeo.com/220483265; http://perezhilton.com/2017-10-26-WAGs-la-exclusive-season-3-supertease#.Wf_iO7pFyM8) strongly suggest that the women’s identities are largely due to the women’s status as a partner to the professional athlete, with the ultimate goal of getting “the ring.” Indeed, even when the female characters appear onscreen, the show’s producers, via typeset, identify the women as the “wife of…” or “former fiancé of…” or “girlfriend of….” What the show’s and producers’ branding strongly suggest to viewers is that WAGs are to be perceived as women who are just in it for the money, the status, the fame, the “wife of…,” and the glamorous life behind the velvet ropes. In other words, the WAGs, through the show’s advertising, are largely portrayed as gold-diggers in search of status—a status achieved by getting and holding on to a professional athlete as a partner, preferably as a husband: The ring. As such, what the show suggests, and that is what the viewers are largely conditioned to believe, is that a woman’s identity is largely created, maintained and reified through the partner.
Interestingly, however, after taking a deeper delve into the data, the status of one’s partner is by far the least frequently coded category in terms of how the women communicate identity via social media. Indeed, two of the three cells in the category of *Identity formed through status of partner* had fewer than five Tweets within the sampling frame examined. Particular to the sampling frame examined for the purposes of this investigation, what the viewers might be led to embrace by the show’s producers deviates from how the women within that time- and sampling frame were communicating to the public about themselves.

As noted above, the category most frequently populated with data was *Identity formed through self*. Based on the Tweets included in this investigation, the women appear to be using the show’s platform to launch bigger and better things for themselves. Interestingly, and as aforementioned, the show’s messaging to the audience through this promotion is that getting “the ring” is the desired endpoint for the women. Interestingly, however, among the women examined in this investigation, it was the wife who was the most promoting of her identity via the self of the three cast members examined in this investigation. That is, the one individual examined who did have the ring didn’t rest of the laurels of being the “wife;” rather, she was the one among the three women to most frequently promote a self (not wifely) identity. An example of wife Autumn exemplifying the *identity formed through self*-category is when she replied to a Tweet and said, “No too involved just think it’s strange when someone doesn’t do ANYTHING that goes on in their man’s career.” An example of fiancée Natalie identifying through self is when she Re-Tweets a Tweet that says, “@nataliehalcro is absolutely my favorite WAG! Love what she represents: independence, girl power, and a good time…& still in a relationship #WAGs.” And lastly, girlfriend Ashley responded to a Tweet that said, “L.A. Lakers point guard Jordan Clarkson heads to the Four Seasons Los Angeles for an exclusive style session with
celebrity stylist Ashley North.” Thus, whereas the viewer might be led to believe due to WAGs’ promotional material, relational status typesets onscreen (e.g., “Wife of….”), etc. is that the women on this series are strongly partner-identity focused, the women themselves tell an otherwise story through their social media messaging. To the viewers, particularly younger and/or more impressionable viewers/female viewers, this finding holds positive value. Specifically, the women on the show are demonstrating that there is much more to them than what might meet the eye or than what the show’s producers might want you to believe. Yes, the women might be attractive and might be in relationships with recognizable professional athletes, but they are also entrepreneurial, smart, business minded women with identities of their own, extricated from being a WAG. When given opportunity through their respective social media accounts and platforms, this messaging (i.e., Identity through self) was most embraced by the women across the two seasons examined in this investigation and, interestingly, was most frequent for the one woman with “the ring” (i.e., married Autumn).

Limitations

Although this content analysis provides beneficial contributions to the field and to consumers of reality documentary television, there still exist a few noteworthy limitations. This study took particular interest in WAGs because of its timeliness, relevancy and the gap in the literature. However, this study only examined Tweets pulled from two seasons of the show. After visiting the women’s Twitter profile pages following the conclusion of this investigation, it appears as if the three women were more active following the season finale. It is possible that examining more Tweets could have contributed to the coding categories and sample. Another limitation is that some Tweets had an expired link attached.
The expired link could have possibly contained a photo that would added significance to the coding categories and sample. Some of the Tweets in the sample were not codable given the coding criteria for this investigation. In other words, there was no coding category it could fit into nor could the Tweet be used to create a theoretically meaningful additional category. For example, some of the women were Tweeting things such as “Season premiere tonight. Make sure to tune in!” or “Lol.” As stated previously, the consideration of a larger sample by expanding the anchor point dates could have invited more Tweets in for discussion and made up for the dead weight of these kinds of Tweets.

Another limitation stems from the method. A directed content analysis is supposed to be as objective as possible. The interval criterion of every 6th Tweet pulled for the less frequent Tweeter and 20th Tweet pulled for the more frequent Tweeter was set up at the onset of the study because the entire population of Tweets over the course of two years was too big for the amount of time the author had and seemed most reasonable. The author didn’t know until after combing through the data that the 2000 Tweets she started with would drop significantly down to 175 Tweets. On hindsight had the author known at onset what was known after the fact she would have looked at all of the Tweets within the timeframe.

Similarly, examining all of the Tweets within the sampling frame might have uncovered additional information and/or support for existing categories. Also of consideration is that some Tweets met criteria of two categories (typically Identify through self and Identity through media), which is worthy of mention given the mutual exclusivity assumption of categories. Related, some of the cells in the Identity through partner held fewer than 5 Tweets. Finally, although Natalie was often referred to as a fiancée, she is technically a former fiancée.
A limitation concerning the show WAGs itself is that it only documents the personal and professional lives of those in a heteronormative relationship. The producer might cast the women as being a little friendlier with one another in an episode which would suggest something to viewers. However, the woman goes right back to “normal” following the episode. Couples of the same sex are not showcased on the show and are still not with the expansion of the brand WAGs in other cities. With that being said, it’s fair to say that the study is representative, but with consideration of heteronormative couples only.

A limitation also exists as it relates to the social media platform, Twitter, used in the current investigation. Specifically, since the execution of this investigation (when the platform supported 140 maximum character Tweets), Twitter has expanded to allow 280 character Tweets. The company first announced the move beyond its traditional 140 characters earlier this year, noting a longer character count would allow users to express how they really feel without feeling limited.

Lastly, adding different social media platforms into the sample with a mix of multimedia journalism, aside from photos, would have contributed to the study as well with a different perspective on a platform that works to appeal to both audiences, such as Instagram. This addition could have potentially made a contribution to the coding categories and implications for platform agendas as well.

**Future Directions**

Future research regarding WAGs can contribute to further understanding of media portrayal of identity, social identity and society as a whole. Social identity theory argues that individuals see themselves based on the group in which they are part of. However, addressing this issue from a multi-method approach can contribute to better understanding
the predictive and explanatory functions of social identity theory. Although WAGs and reality documentary television are likely to exist for a long time, re-visiting the Tweets and episodes of the show can also contribute to the current study as the story of identity formation unfolds. A comparison in how the women Tweeted when the show first started versus current might serve as a follow-up study as well. It would be interesting to see if the female is still considered a WAG. If she is no longer part of the hierarchy is she using social media in the same way? How is she portraying herself through language with a loss of status so to say?

When selecting the sample for each WAG, there was video with text, but an analysis of the video component was not included in the current investigation. An examination of videos in future research can allow for nonverbal cues, tone of voice and how it may or may not ultimately differ from the textual data, to be analyzed. Images were also included with the textual data and included in the current study, but as previously mentioned some links were broken; therefore, the Tweet had to be skipped. Alternatively, other news outlets incorporated newer pictures as well as a mixture of two images, which could be interpreted as a before and after. Analyzing the photographs that each media outlet chose to incorporate can also contribute to their stance on identity formation.

For a future study regarding identity formation and reality documentary television, it would be interesting to look at how the transitional images of television facilitate people, demand attention and eventually influence their thoughts and behavior (Pahad, Karkare, & Bhatt, 2015). Pahad, Karkare, and Bhatt (2015) suggest that media have potentially profound effects on the social identity formation of those in close, intimate relationships. Furthermore, changing periods increase identity exploration and changes in identity (Anthis, 2002). Of specific consideration are millennials because their use of social media
is blatant due to its accessibility and availability. Social media is an added dimension past generations did not have nor was there such a thing as social media reinforcement, negation, or confusion.

An alternative lens to evaluate the data with another theoretical framework is Erving Goffman’s concept of impression management. This study sought to examine how women in a relationship with an elite athlete form, reform, and reify identity on a continuous basis. A future study could then evaluate how the women express their identity. Furthermore, how the women use a concept central to the theory, impression management, to influence how they are perceived by other people.

According to Goffman, “social interaction may be likened to a theater and people in everyday life to actors on a stage, each playing a variety of roles,” (Crossman, 2018, para. 2). During interpersonal interactions, much like that in theatrical performances, there is a, “front stage” region where the actors are on stage before an audience and their expectations influence the actor’s behavior. There is also a backstage where, “individuals can relax, be themselves, and the role or identity that they play when they are in front of others,” (Crossman, 2018, para. 3). How the females act on the show WAGs can be likened to that of a theatrical performance. It could be postulated that the females are just playing their role as villain, hero, etc while the show is on air to help the producers achieve their means to an end, high ratings (front stage). As soon as the broadcast is over the females go back to being their “normal” selves (back stage) and use social media to establish a new front stage to prevent a negative impression of themselves. WAGs then becomes the new front stage of WAGs. The question then becomes will the audience be able to recognize that there are two different identities going on and be able to keep them separate? Furthermore, will the
audience be able to accept why the females are portraying two different sides of themselves?

A takeaway quickly learned from the show WAGs is that we use media as a learning tool in regards to life, love, sex, etc. Reality documentary television has influenced viewer creation, giving a sense of who one should be. For example, an implication about men is that success determines what kind of partner you get. You must have and earn an “x” amount of money if you want a woman who looks and acts a certain way. An implication about women is that you must look and act a certain way if you want “x” type of man. With that being said, it would be interesting to document what effects does that have on self-esteem? There is a suggested parallelism with how viewers see the characters on social media networks such as Twitter, but the producer displays something else. This immediately instigates confusion with the “self” and others.

Conclusion

As previous scholars note, what the media presents are bound to have an impact on public opinion (McCombs & Shaw, 2009; McCombs, 2009). Television, specifically reality documentary television, has become one of the most powerful form of media (Pahad, Karkare, & Bhatt, 2015). Television is able to disseminate the message of development and modernization to create awareness for generating public participation. Television, acting as the audio-visual medium it is, enables society to come together during events in an exciting and clarifying way. As a direct replica of a nation’s personality it has the abilities to recall the past, dwell upon the present and foreshadow the future of a society. With the capability to reach concomitantly millions of people, television provides the masses a common experience at the same time, in a stratified degree. More importantly, television, is a one-way channel of communication. The communicator on a television screen cannot enjoy the
affinity with their audience which makes difference between a one-sided performance and a true interaction of communicator and receiver. As a result the communicator has an easier time stimulating and reinforcing ideas, beliefs and tendencies.

This dependence humans have on media deserves recognition, as it can shape upcoming generations. No matter the form, whether it be film, news, television, social media, etc. media use is not going anywhere anytime soon and will keep on attracting more consumers. Some food for thought, the average American is exposed to media at least four hours per day which is equivalent to nine years in his or her lifetime (Berger, 2008). Without question, this study acknowledges media as a powerful medium in society. Individuals look to media conglomerates when they want orientation on who they are as an individual and consume the information often in a outlying manner rather than being critical of the information (McCombs 2004; McCombs, 2009; Petty, Briñol & Priester, 2009).

However, as McCombs (2004) notes, it is important to remember that we, as media consumers, are equally as responsible in selecting what media we consume. As the current study suggests, messages about life, relationships, love, etc. communicated by the media, specifically reality documentary T.V., are subliminal. The media is strategic in the way it chooses to “produce” the mindset and actions of those idolized on television (McCombs, 2004). Given many individuals may turn to television for orientation it could lead them to deductions ultimately affecting their attitudes or relationships with other individuals. With that being said, further research is needed and could possibly unveil how authoritative it actually is. To illustrate, Malcolm X once said, “The media’s the most powerful entity on
earth. They have the power to make the innocent guilty and to make the guilty innocent, and that’s power. Because they control the minds of the masses” (King, 2010, p. 199).
Appendix

Key:
S= Identity formed through self
SP=Identity formed through status of partner
M=Identity formed through media (producers)
Only watch @WAGSone4 for @OliviaPierson & @nataliehalcro 😍

Natalie Halcro Retweeted

vv @NISIKM · 7 Sep 2015
from the sneak peeks of WAGS that I've seen, I actually want to watch the show just cuz of @nataliehalcro and @OliviaPierson 😍

TerrionneSpears @TerrionneHarmony · 7 Sep 2015
Only thing that's getting me excited for tomorrow is watching my favs @OliviaPierson @nataliehalcro & @JusttNic on WAGS! 😍

Lex @RamakersLexi · 7 Sep 2015
@OliviaPierson, @nataliehalcro and @JusttNic should just have their own show. No need for the other girls! Hilarious and beautiful. Hell ya!

Michele Tian @MeshelayMp · 7 Sep 2015
Don't take this the wrong way but you're THICK! I'm little and thick & it's refreshing to see girls like you on TV! Go girl!
Natalie Halcro @nataliehalcro · 8 Sep 2015
We don’t either! #family

Karyn @KJamjekian
I don’t like when @OliviaPierson & @nataliehalcro argue 🙄 #Wags

 Damn Good Alcoholic @AllMeQuotes · 8 Sep 2015
It’s funny cause @nataliehalcro @OliviaPierson are cousins so it’s kinda cute when they fight fam love

ByPopularDemand @MattiKnowles · 8 Sep 2015
Great to see @nataliehalcro empowering women to be strong and independant 😊

BRANDI WILLIAMS @BRANDIWILLIAM20 · 8 Sep 2015
Watching #WAGS Yet again My girls @OliviaPierson @nataliehalcro @justinic
Stole the show I ❤️ them !!! #bestfriendgoals
Natalie Halcro Retweeted

nick @xxOnikki · 8 Sep 2015
in love w @OliviaPierson & @nataliehalcro they're so gorgeous 💫#WAGS #baddies

Natalie Halcro Retweeted

jocelyne @sandovallll · 8 Sep 2015
I literally on ya c wags bc of @nataliehalcro @OliviaPierson @JusttNic

Natalie Halcro Retweeted

alana bacchus @Devote91 · 8 Sep 2015
us love seeing your beatness 😘ᾶς

Natalie Halcro Retweeted

Dama Good Alcoholic @AllMeQuotes · 8 Sep 2015
@nataliehalcro @OliviaPierson need their own show ... Without "w vses"

Natalie Halcro Retweeted

KAE HENRY @kmerieee9 · 8 Sep 2015
You better tell em Natalie!!! 🙏🙏🙏🙏🙏
@natalie_halcro
dashbella

On 11/4 pic wathing wags

Sulaimana

@nataliehalcro

uv u nat you are my founte wags

ms_yusuf_buhari

Serious I loved wags just because of @nataliehalcro u are my role model

Sterling Dickson Jr.

Re @WAGSone

© WAGSone @nataliehalcro Such an amazing beauty

@nataliehalcro and @WAGSone ever
Natalie Halcro
@nataliehalcro

Tweets 1,250
Following 41
Followers 85.8K
Likes 466

1. Natalie Halcro Retweeted
   Shakari Trevel @Shkari - 22 Sep 2015
   "Olivia Pierson & Natalie Halcro are literally the only entertaining thing about
   this show. No disrespect, but this show's boring. #WAGS"
   ❤️ 3  ❤️ 2

2. Natalie Halcro Retweeted
   Volga @VolgaSeri - 22 Sep 2015
   "Reposting to Olivia Pierson
   OliviaPierson @nataliehalcro you guys WILL have your own show one day 😊
   #Perfection 😍 😍 😍
   ❤️ 1  ❤️ 3

3. Natalie Halcro Retweeted
   alejandra @paricio1616 - 22 Sep 2015
   "I want a friendship @nataliehalcro & Olivia Pierson 😍 STUNNING GIRLS
   #WAGS"
   ❤️ 2  ❤️ 6

4. Natalie Halcro Retweeted
   @terryjose - 22 Sep 2015
   "M@tthew, they're pure native beauties #Lovely #WAGS"
   ❤️ 2  ❤️ 5

5. Natalie Halcro Retweeted
   Maria B Rodriguez @MariaB01 - 22 Sep 2015
   "Love you girls, Barbie is cool. The others act so
   f**ked up everyone it's so annoying
   #WAGS"
   ❤️ 3  ❤️ 2
JES CRAVEN @jescra - 22 Sep 2015
LOVE that @nataliekhalcro is on a different vibe than sooo many wags. chauvinism
is losing your personality.

Kris Wilson @kris_wilson - 22 Sep 2015
Bravo channel absolutely my fav WAG! Love what she represents -
independence, girl power & a good time! & still in a relationship!

Reyyzins @Reyyzins - 22 Sep 2015
#WAGS @OliviaPaxson @nataliekhalcro @laurynagle 😍

TerriioneHarmony @TerriioneHarmony - 22 Sep 2015
Lusty is one lucky guy to be surrounded by 3 beautiful women @AustNic
@OliviaPaxson @nataliekhalcro #WAGS

alanabacchus @Devote91 - 22 Sep 2015
I'm in the same position I feel you in that one @nataliekhalcro #WAGS

Anthony Grasso @AnthonyGrasso - 22 Sep 2015
- #WAGS @nataliekhalcro #WAGS
Natalie Halcro
@nataleehalcro

@nataleehalcro @OliviaPierson obsessed with both your hair and make up, the most gorgeous girls. Love watching you two on Tuesdays. 😍

Natalie Halcro
@nataleehalcro · 23 Sep 2015
- Miss last night's brand new WAGS? Watch OnDemand or find out when it's on again here.

WAGS
The official site for WAGS show clips, photos, videos, show schedule, and news from EOnline

Samantha Murphy @sammurphy · 23 Sep 2015
hands down the best Wags are @nataleehalcro and @OliviaPierson 😍😍😍

Kelly Lamich @ookellylamich · 23 Sep 2015
Replied to @OliviaPierson
Olivia Pierson @OliviaPierson I mean who wouldn't want Shots and funny faces 😜

Kedah Stotser @KedahStotser · 23 Sep 2015
Natalie Halcro®
@nataliehalcro

Tweets: 1,250
Following: 41
Followers: 85.8K
Likes: 456

Natalie Halcro Retweeted

rvm @rosa_wooster - 25 Sep 2015
Literally only watch @WYGOff to look at @nataliehalcro & Olivia Pierson 😊

Natalie Halcro Retweeted

mss_yusuf_buhari @MimieKalbume618 - 25 Sep 2015
Like seriously @nataliehalcro has the sexiest smile and the most sexy eyes on earth, can't wait 4 episode 7 I know u are gonna kill it again

Natalie Halcro Retweeted

alejandria @spanic1616 - 25 Sep 2015
@nataliehalcro are my new FAVORITE thing on YouTu...
Natalie Halcro
@nataliehalcro

Tweets: 1,250
Following: 41
Followers: 85.8K
Likes: 466

Natalie Halcro Retweeted
DreDeveraux @DreDeveraux - 30 Sep 2015
I love @OliviaPierson and @nataliehalcro family, they so adorable and supportive. I wish my family was supportive. 😊жал, #WAGS

Natalie Halcro Retweeted
Indi ❤️ @ThatTallGirl - 30 Sep 2015
I'm obsessed with @nataliehalcro 🥰

Natalie Halcro Retweeted
Brooke Hansen @brookehansen2 - 30 Sep 2015
@nataliehalcro I only watch the show 'wiąga' to see you and @OliviaPierson Goddesses

Natalie Halcro Retweeted
Skinny Delight @skinny_delight - 30 Sep 2015
'wiąga' is my guilty pleasure. Make me beautiful 😊nateliehalcro 😊OliviaPierson
what you deserve!

Natalie Halcro Retweeted

Allee @Loveale15 · 21 Aug 2016
I honestly need @OliveFerson and @nataliehalcro’s doses!! 😭😭😭

Natalie Halcro @nataliehalcro · 21 Aug 2016
I second this 😂

Autumn Ajinrotutu @Ajinrotutu
Oh me gooooooosh crying after 5 years...really?! I cannot.

Colin Daniels @GabeBscayne · 21 Aug 2016
I live for @OliveFerson & @nataliehalcro styles! They slay me
@nataliehalcro

Tweets: 1,250
Followers: 85.8K
Likes: 466

1. Natalie Holcro Retweeted
   @clanigop - 1 Oct 2015
   @nataliehalcro to Alex.

2. Natalie Holcro Retweeted
   @LoreneD92 - 1 Oct 2015

3. Natalie Holcro Retweeted
   @wrestling_1000 - 1 Oct 2015
   finale

4. Natalie Holcro Retweeted
   @SPadellaro - 1 Oct 2015

5. Natalie Holcro Retweeted
   @Nahda_Az - 1 Oct 2015

Search Twitter
Tune in for the premiere of #WAGS TONIGHT at 10|9c on E!

...and remember— wives never show up late.
Autumn Ajigbade Retweeted

WAGS on E @WAGSone - 25 Aug 2015

@AutumnAjigbade's hubby, Seyi @ctatu19, was voted by teammates: Chargers' Special Teams Player of the Year #WAGS
Autumn Ajilotutu
@AutumnAjilotutu

Tweets 652
Following 24
Followers 12.9K
Likes 505

Autumn Ajilotutu @AutumnAjilotutu · 28 Aug 2013
What can I say the kid loves to take a selfie and sing her phonics/alphabet song.
# autocupmemetalnessedie # ajilotutu

WAGS On E @WAGSOnE
WAGSRule Teach your children how to pose for selfies at day one.

Ryan @RyanKearney2 · 28 Aug 2015
@WAGSOnE @nataleahraincro @TheSashaWay @TheBobbyBlakc @Justahic
@AutumnAjilotutu @AshleyNorth @OliviaPerson 100% best show out. Lov it

Autumn Ajilotutu @AutumnAjilotutu · 28 Aug 2015
Thanks Doll:

Ryan @RyanKearney2
@AutumnAjilotutu gotta say I'm loving your energy and personality and can't wait see more from you I'm defo #TeamAutumn 🖤 #IshFan
Autumn Ajrotutu Retweeted
@HighHopDX · 31 Aug 2015
#DXExclusive @AutumnAjrotutu

https://t.co/1H9g3Z
Melissa Kalloë @MelissaKalloë
@AutumnAjiotutu the funniest line dropper @WAGSonE 😄

Ebony @iamebony_ - 2 Sep 2015
I didn't think I would like #WAGS but I do. @TheSistaWay @AutumnAjiotutu and @OfficePeton are my favorites

Kimberly Smith @aliambacpa
@AutumnAjiotutu just watched another episode. Do you workout everyday? For how long? Thx

Ahaha, I'm feeling more on the highskay kinda side right now

Dariel Gutierrez @darkiciousssss
Autumn Ajiórotutu @AutumnAjíórotutu - 7 Sep 2015
Thank you love! 😊 twitter.com/diaacig平方公里

This Tweet is unretweetable.

Autumn Ajiórotutu @AutumnAjíórotutu - 5 Sep 2015
My Eagles-Fly 😊 So proud of my husband! 😊 in steps to

heavenly @akirkland21 - 5 Sep 2015
Every girl needs friends like @AutumnAjíórotutu and ☛ TheStuckVenue. When those THOTS came for @TheStuckVenue they had her back 😊

heavenly @akirkland21 - 5 Sep 2015
home girl said she was sorry & she’s not like the other wags. CHICK YOUR NOT A WAG PERIOD! Smh groupies

heavenly @akirkland21 - 5 Sep 2015
YASSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSS @AutumnAjíórotutu TELL THEM THOTS. THAT’S WHY YOUR A WIFE AND THEY’RE NOT! LEARN HOW TO ACT
LOVEEEE @AutumnAjirotutu HAIR RIGHT NOW

Autumn Ajirotutu @AutumnAjirotutu - 8 Sep 2015
Name of the game, unfortunately! We aren't the first family and damn it sure won't be the last.

braisleica @brasilmiss
Damn @AutumnAjirotutu and her man going through it with this #WAGS

Autumn Ajirotutu @AutumnAjirotutu - 8 Sep 2015
Ridding for my husband till the end. He's so amazing, he makes it easy.

alma bacchus @Aleme91
she is a trooper that's how Autumn @AshleyNorth @AutumnAjirotutu #WAGS

Autumn Ajirotutu @AutumnAjirotutu - 8 Sep 2015
😉 if I was single I get it, but not over an eye roll lol

Nicole @latoyaNicole209
I agree with @AutumnAjirotutu 100% you and your man as a couple is a whole what you do reflects him, what he does reflects you #WAGS
@AutumnAjerotutu just watched WAGS...your hubby deserved better but it's their loss. You have his back!

@AutumnAjerotutu @AutumnAjerotutu - 8 Sep 2015
I have a lot of friends in the league who are not married. I love and respect them and have the utmost respect for their relationship.

@AutumnAjerotutu @AutumnAjerotutu - 8 Sep 2015
It’s okay! We’re excited! The team looks good! He’s so happy in Philly!

Darrin Silverman @darrinbxchclub
Replying to @AutumnAjerotutu
@AutumnAjerotutu @Devote91 @AshleyNorth sorry you have to move. Hope he has a great year and gets a nice contract next season.

@AutumnAjerotutu @AutumnAjerotutu - 8 Sep 2015
Pushed with our children’s clothing line!

Sasha Gates @TheSashaagini
What do you think of the WAGS 2nd? I’m going to miss @AutumnAjerotutu at the games! But we have @wifle_one. So cute!
Autumn Ajiratutu @AutumnAjiratutu

95
Autumn Ajirrotutu
@AutumnAjirrotutu

Karyn @KJAmieham
@AutumnAjirrotutu is such an important role model to all of us as she always stands firm in being yourself and not changing for anyone. #WAGS

bye!

Olivia and Natalie are annoying as y'all are girffeneds @AutumnAjirrotutu is a wife so gir bye & Lol #WAGS @WAGSOnE

Period! I wish he would try cussing me out!

brasileira @brasileira
@AutumnAjirrotutu that's not cool that she got on you ab out her man acting like an idiot. she should have checked him. #WAGS
Autumn Ajírotutu @AutumnAjírotutu 15 Sep 2015
My boobs be workin' me! But wouldn't change it for the world. Love my twincissies 😘 PG-13.

WAGS on E!
. @AutumnAjírotutu s actually super woman. #WAGS
Machete Productions @Machete_TV · 15 Sep 2015
How adorable are @saddettv and @AutumnAjirotutu? That's love. #PHAGS

@Autumn Ajirotutu @AutumnAjirotutu · 16 Sep 2015
alex @sp_ALE_right
@AutumnAjirotutu you are my favorite wag hands down. so proud of you for standing up for what you believe in and what's right

@E D Rouse @ErikaDavieRouse · 15 Sep 2015
watermelon either #TeamAutumn #wags
Autumn Ajirrotutu (@AutumnAjirrotutu)

Tweets 652
Following 24
Followers 12.9K
Likes 505

Autumn Ajirrotutu @AutumnAjirrotutu · 24 Sep 2015
Which is why I said both races suffered in the development of this country. There's no comparison. https://twitter.com/NurdiqTall...

This Tweet is unavailable.

Autumn Ajirrotutu @AutumnAjirrotutu · 23 Sep 2015
I actually took a semester in college and studied Slavery in America.

Ebony Laprocina @RandomsByEbboe
@AshleyNorth @AutumnAjirrotutu ya'll need to study what happened to Native Americans too! Slavery & Native Americans=2 Biggest US Atrocities

Autumn Ajirrotutu @AutumnAjirrotutu · 22 Sep 2015
No. I'm from the bay. Quita pocket means when you do something stupid. I'd up all the above. Lol twitter.com/2Kar1580/read/st...

This Tweet is unavailable.

Autumn Ajirrotutu @AutumnAjirrotutu · 22 Sep 2015
@ me and @AshleyNorth would love to hang /be friends regardless if you weren't a wag too twitter.com/p8creweoj/stat...
Autumn Ajerotutu (@AutumnAjerotutu) - 24 Sep 2015

Shows how much you know. Reparation for newly black slaves was "40 archers and a mule". Which was never given. twitter.com/ahistoric/stat... This Tweet is unavailable.

Autumn Ajerotutu (@AutumnAjerotutu) - 24 Sep 2015

Did your Aunt get rapped by a group of white men walking home at the age of 15? This can keep going... twitter.com/ahistoric/stat... This Tweet is unavailable.

Autumn Ajerotutu (@AutumnAjerotutu) - 24 Sep 2015

To have long hair? Was your Father not able to play with his best friend publicly cause of his skin color? twitter.com/ahistoric/stat... This Tweet is unavailable.

Autumn Ajerotutu (@AutumnAjerotutu) - 24 Sep 2015

I have Cherokee Indian in me. Did your grandmother have to cut her hair because Florida law didn’t allow Blacks twitter.com/ahistoric/stat...
Thank you. 😊😊😊😊😊😊😊❤️

@ku

Autumn

Na

24 Sep 2015

ku.StyleEyes ☺️
Autumn Ajirotutu (@AutumnAjirotutu) - 5 Oct 2015

Thank you! Haha makes me soooo happy 😊😊😊

Melanie Tarjick (@MelTarjick)
Replying to @AutumnAjirotutu

@AutumnAjirotutu love your show. Your honesty cracks me up. Admire ur Christian & believe in God. Our Lord & Savior. #TWAGS

Ameera (@greenyy_)
@imanikadei @AutumnAjirotutu OMG! I love her so bad

Jackson (@JacksonSeth35) - 3 Oct 2015

First time watching @AutumnAjirotutu & it’s AMAIZING. 😊😊😊 @OliviaHenson
Brie @brinetele
@AutumnAjirotutu all these people coming for you when you didn’t even send for them... Very sad😊😊

Autumn Ajirotutu @AutumnAjirotutu · 6 Oct 2015
Even if you’re annoyed you can have it all!! 💚

Julia Barela @juliaMFella
@AutumnAjirotutu is getting slightly annoying. Also @nataliehalcro be proud being an independent woman. #womenempowerment

Autumn Ajirotutu @AutumnAjirotutu · 6 Oct 2015
❤️❤️

Jasmine @JasmineMarie_00
@AutumnAjirotutu Autumn is goals like she has her family she is sweet with them and then she just speaks the truth with the other WAGS

Autumn Ajirotutu @AutumnAjirotutu · 6 Oct 2015
My center of validation is to not be married. But I love my husband and grateful to found my happily ever after when I did.
she does make perfect little babies tho and is super gorg with her new dark hair <3 @AutumnAjireotutu

Autumn Ajireotutu @AutumnAjireotutu 6 Oct 2015
No to involved just think it’s strange when someone doesn’t do ANYTHING that goes with their main career.

Stephanie Lauret @stephenlelangi
I feel like @AutumnAjireotutu was getting a little too involved in @nataliahalfcres relationship marriage isn’t the ultimate end goal 4 every 1

Autumn Ajireotutu @AutumnAjireotutu 6 Oct 2015
Relax.

Angie Trejo @angrialcatcraw
Ew @AutumnAjireotutu is the most annoying shi needs to get off the show #WAGS

Autumn Ajireotutu @AutumnAjireotutu 6 Oct 2015
Yeah Li don’t egg me on Axt. twitter.com/atlanticand/s...
Uhhhh that’s considered plus size? No wonder we have body image issues.

Plus-size model Iskra Lawrence shares tips for maintaining a healthy body over the holidays people.eyJvYmplY3QiOiJyZWFkIn0
heavenly @lilkland21 - 15 Jun 2016
"MY GIRLS @AutumnAjirobutu and @TheSashawOY ARE BACK HATERS. LET'S GET IT!!!" #WAGS

Autumn Ajirobutu @AutumnAjirobutu - 15 Jun 2016

Donovan Swartbood @Donny_Bitch
@AutumnAjirobutu The BEST WAG. #JustSaying

Lol! Love it! I heard that girl.

This Tweet is unavailable.

Autumn Ajirobutu Retweeted
coming soon @TVba - 9 Jun 2016
Recipes & more w/ #WAGS star @AutumnAjirobutu, today only on @sdtv on @CW5SanDiego!

Autumn Ajirobutu Retweeted
Dean Hall @DeanHallStyle - 6 Jun 2016
Come and see @AutumnAjirobutu and I at potterybarn_fashionvalley this Sunday!
Autumn Ajiotutu (@AutumnAjiotutu) - 29 Jun 2016
Broops 😍❤️

brittany wade (@brittanywade)
Who does this Sophia hitch think she is questioning @AutumnAjiotutu marriage? You should be looking at your cousin. 😝

Autumn Ajiotutu (@AutumnAjiotutu) - 29 Jun 2016
My two favorite things right now are a warm Hair by @erikbcvnran; Custom lashes... Instagram.com/p/Q3h5Q0Df5W5/

Autumn Ajiotutu (@AutumnAjiotutu) - 29 Jun 2016
Awwww 😍❤️ love you too girl! ❤️

Alexandrine (@MiniUJLee)
I love you Autumn 😊 @AutumnAjiotutu #WAGS

Autumn Ajiotutu (@AutumnAjiotutu) - 29 Jun 2016
For the record I do not feel this way. Only a few of my bestfriends are married nor do I feel I’m better than any! 😏

Jessica (@YesSingletony)
Autumn Ajiroutu®
@AutumnAjiroutu

Who's watching?! 📺

My favorite show come on tonight @WigsonE just to watch two of my favorite wags @TheSashaWay & @AutumnAjiroutu

Vibe Magazine® @VibeMagazine • 1 Jul 2016
@YGSSonE Stars @AutumnAjiroutu & @TheSashaWay share turning reality TV fame into fortune on Vibe.com/29bebCw
Autumn Ajirotutu (@Au) Twitter Inc. [US] twitter.com/AutumnAjirotutu

Home Moments Search Twitter

Autumn Ajirotutu (@AutumnAjirotutu) 7 Jul 2015

Octopling us

Perez Hilton (@PerezHilton)
New video shows #AltonSterling was NOT holding a gun when he was shot & killed. #RIP goo.gl/1uE66e

Autumn Ajirotutu (@AutumnAjirotutu) 5 Jul 2015

Fraying for #AltonSterling and #AltonSterlingFamily. I can’t even sleep. 😥❤️

Autumn Ajirotutu (@AutumnAjirotutu) 4 Jul 2016

Happy 4th of July. Everyone! May God continue to bless America and your families. ❤️❤️❤️

Autumn Ajirotutu (@AutumnAjirotutu) 3 Jul 2016

Always had love for @ThaGangstaRatb: ALWAYS ❤️

J-Hopeless. #RIPJaeTillz @r_jaeTillz
You don’t like someone, but you’re mad that they didn’t invite you. #WAGS,
Sazón Goya Lomacang @AyLiletalsa
@AutumnAjiotutu has really mastered the delightfully-classy shade! Come ma, let's be friends and teach me your ways. Lol

Autumn Ajiotutu @AutumnAjiotutu - 10 Jul 2016

I'm DEFINITELY not validated by having a husband. Happy! married my best friend and we made two beautiful children 💕

Jessica @jaccika3
@AutumnAjiotutu It crazy how u are validated by having a husband like that make u a complete women because you're married. U should want

KweenErni @ErinnCanille
@AutumnAjiotutu is giving me life in these feathers 😍
Autumn Ajiotutu @AutumnAjiotutu

Tweets: 652
Following: 24
Followers: 12,923
Likes: 506

Autumn Ajiotutu @AutumnAjiotutu · 15 Jul 2016
Thanks, I totally agree it is definitely an over kill. I do not get validation for being someone’s wife...

Cynthia Ayub @CynthiaAyub
@AutumnAjiotutu why do get validation from having a husband oh am a wifey oh blah blah, so are 10m other women nice hair though:

Autumn Ajiotutu @AutumnAjiotutu · 15 Jul 2016

thiago @gossanga · 15 Jul 2016
@AutumnAjiotutu BRAZIL LOVES YOU QUEEN!!!

Slobhan Diores @sobhan_415
"I'm from the Baz, they don't want it." - @AutumnAjiotutu #truth #dontcomeforaboychick

Autumn Ajiotutu @AutumnAjiotutu · 14 Jul 2016
❤️❤️❤️❤️❤️ thanks boo!
Autumn Ajerotutu @AutumnAjerotutu - 2 Sep 2015
Thanks Liv!!! Yeah, he's awesome. He's always done the same for me ❤️

SUE_RUS 🌸 @BopitaSchica
@AutumnAjerotutu Your the best, I love how you have your shit together and stick by your HUSBAND 😊

Autumn Ajerotutu @AutumnAjerotutu - 2 Sep 2015
Negative ❤️(ignore)

I hope sincerely drink @AutumnAjerotutu on @WAGSionE she's so condescending, stuck up and rude

Autumn Ajerotutu @AutumnAjerotutu - 1 Sep 2016
Loving red lately! 🍃 Instagram.com/p/Biy29qF3n97/

Autumn Ajerotutu @AutumnAjerotutu - 25 Aug 2016
Hi Guys! I launched my food blog today... With a little bit of lifestyle! Go check it out! 🍂 Insta.com/p/Bl3Ug9bx7/
Autumn Ajirotu (@AutumnAjirotu) 2016

Thank youuuu I love it too, but may be time for a change! What do you think?

Ab P. (@ahumadaAeva)
@AutumnAjirotu Hi, you look so good with dark hair

Thanks love! That's how it should be! 😊

Real Deal (@RealonRealty)
I love @AutumnAjirotu. Such a good woman, always standing by her man.
#goodgirl #goodwife #loyal #ideoodie #truewoman #truelove

Nothing like denim on denim and a bomb white body suit from @jarslabel 😍
instagram.com/p/BXLSZ7hQP4/

No problem! ❤️

LaTonya Fuqua (@PostFuqua)
Autumn Ajiootatu

Tweets
667

FOLLOWERS
12.9K
LIKES
505

Autumn Ajiootatu

11 Sep 2014
LOVE this 😍❤️

Mahla @mahlaad6000
@AutumnAjiootatu @WAGobi Fans!

Autumn Ajiootatu
11 Sep 2014
Ah, my dad buys you a lot of things on sale, but one thing he can’t buy is your integrity God... bad advice is even it. Learn from it and grow.

8:10 119

Autumn Ajiootatu
11 Sep 2014
Hi Philip! Thanks for the comment... it’s a nice day out.

The Tweet is unavailable.

Autumn Ajiootatu
11 Sep 2014
Thank you!! I love the look of yours and had to tell you I’m OBSESSED 😭

Catherine @Catherine
@AutumnAjiootatu I love the look of yours and had to tell you I’m OBSESSED 😭

https://twitter.com/AutumnAjiootatu/status/774767895179565693
Autumn Ajirobuto® @AutumnAjirobuto

Tweets 652  Following 24  Followers 12.9K  Likes 505

Autumn Ajirobuto® @AutumnAjirobuto  2 Aug 2016
I guess you do not watch reality tv, but because I have brown skin and speak my mind I'm embarrassing, okay!

Yolanda Jones @lynnunriesco45
@WAGSonE @AutumnAjirobuto you are an embarrassment to african american women @heSashahWay you should be ashamed of encouraging her

UrbanYenta @UrbanYenta
Re: @WAGSonE
Lol. I use @AutumnAjirobuto is actually my fav, even if she scares me a little (she's fierce... in a good way)

QueenItza @McdonaldRayta
Invitation or not, you still and always tabous. Everybody can't handle that.

Thank youuu 😍
Autumn Ajiotutu
@AutumnAjiotutu
Tweets 652
Following 24
Followers 12.9k
Likes 505

Autumn Ajiotutu
@AutumnAjiotutu - 6 Aug 2016
Thanks 3co! 😃

@BasicAlisha @Elshaheneon4
@AutumnAjiotutu they be comin’ 4 u ruff. But a strong chick don’t ever back down. Especially when she’s got numbers. 😅.Lang #:WAGS

Autumn Ajiotutu
@AutumnAjiotutu - 6 Aug 2016
Reading your message 😍 love you, girl. Thanks for keeping it and speaking your mind. 😊

Blessed @chiefly_4yr
@AutumnAjiotutu Honey, just watch the newest ep.
You need new friends! Their passive aggressive
And don’t u. ever stop speaking up for u

Autumn Ajiotutu
@AutumnAjiotutu - 6 Aug 2016

Brownie @brownie555
@AutumnAjiotutu I love you so much. You are beautiful and very classy.
Just don’t stop being you, Cc:@news

©
CanuckFanInSF @CanuckFanInSF
@AutumnAJirotutu you and your eyebrows deserve a gold medal. Both make WAGS an interesting show. 😊

Autumn AJirotutu @AutumnAJirotutu
22 Aug 2016

Yay!!! 😊

Bianca @b_hurtado918
Replying to @AutumnAJirotutu
@OFFICALROXIIFan Yes!!!

Autumn AJirotutu @AutumnAJirotutu
22 Aug 2016

Thanks boo!!! 😁

LC @georgieiknea2b
Barbie was wrong for not inviting @AutumnAJirotutu to her wedding! But fuck it. u see now she don’t give a f about ur friendship. #WAGS

Autumn AJirotutu @AutumnAJirotutu
21 Aug 2016

Wrecked someones family? Pleassssss... What family? You sound so dumb! When y’all get married? 😂😂😂😂😂
@AutumnAjrotutu

Tweets 652  
Following 24  
Followers 12.9K  
Likes 505

GIF

@AutumnAjrotutu

@LemonAide

&BODY w/ the good @a

Autumn Ajrotutu

Rest in Paradise Prince

Dr...

Autumn Ajrotutu

meh me ugh
LaTonya Foaqua @Poetfoqua
@AutumnAjrotutu Why is it that you were so unforgiving of Natalie in the beginning?

Autumn Ajrotutu @AutumnAjrotutu · 5 Sep 2015
It was so we could relate to the highs and lows of this game has to offer... cuts, injuries, concussions, media, etc. twitter.com/Antonia_Jotutu/...
Autumn Ajirrotutu @AutumnAjirrotutu

I wish my fantasy football was working! 😒

ftxim ticoxur Thiam @TicoxurThiam
Replying to @WAGSonE
ch MT god i love @AutumnAjirrotutu

This Tweet is @ahava a 😏

thank youuu

MERRYALMEZY @salmaaaa89
@AutumnAjirrotutu @WAGSonE autumn is so classy and real and is absolutely my fav on the show❤️❤️❤️
Good Morning! For this recipe check out my latest post on the blog!
#blueberrymuffins... https://instagram.com/p/tQ3EtAjBixu/
Autumn Ajinathua (@Auj) [15 Sep 2016]

@AutumnAjinathua

I love dancing. I’m just bringing that swag to you.

Re: @Auj [24]

Well I think we all know how @AutumnAjinathua got her swag.

@Re: @Auj [6]

That's the secret to swag.

@Autumn Ajinathua [16 Sep 2016]

I'm not sure.

@Twitter.com [4]

This tweet is unactable.

@Autumn Ajinathua [15 Sep 2016]

I can't say.

@Twitter.com [4]

This tweet is unactable.

Irya kapoah (@Iryakapoah)

@AutumnAjinathua: got you always look gorge but blond is my favorite look on you.
And this one 🎀 my little tennis star: https://www.instagram.com/p/BKBl7nJH/

Ashley North 🌈 @AshleyNorth - 11 Oct 2016
This face makes me so happy❤️: https://www.instagram.com/p/BLbW1exzSH/

Ashley North 🌈 @AshleyNorth - 1 Oct 2016
Super cute bottle by @mimiinteractive has become our fav bottle for on the go feedings!! They... https://www.instagram.com/p/BLo1tGnP/

Ashley North 🌈 @AshleyNorth - 25 Sep 2016
Birthday wishes to @KimKardashian! https://www.instagram.com/p/BKtqCmOjMr3/

Ashley North 🌈 @AshleyNorth - 19 Sep 2016
The many faces of Clayne https://www.instagram.com/p/BKm5uSCQc/
References


Ajirotutu, A. [AutumnAjirotutu]. (2015, September 8). Riding for my husband till the end! He’s so amazing, he makes it easy. Retrieved from twitter.com/autumnajirotutu

Ajirotutu, A. [AutumnAjirotutu]. (2015, October 6). My center of validation is to not be married. But I love my husband and grateful I found my happily ever after when I did… Retrieved from twitter.com/autumnajirotutu

Ajirotutu, A. [AutumnAjirotutu]. (2016, June 29). For the record I do not feel this way. Only a few of my best friends are married nor do I feel I’m better than any1. Retrieved from twitter.com/autumnajirotutu


Ajirotutu, A. [AutumnAjirotutu]. (2016, September 21). Money can buy you a lot of things in life, but one thing it can’t buy is good integrity. Good, bad, indifferent. Own it. Learn from it and grow. Retrieved from twitter.com/autumnajirotutu


Bacchus, A. [Devote91]. (2015, September 1). OK time out time out…Ashley slow down boo @WAGsonE. Retrieved from twitter.com/AshleyNorth


Brasileira. [brasilmiss]. (2015, September 15). @AutumnAjirotutu that’s not cool that she got on you about her man acting like an idiot. She should have checked him. #WAGS. Retrieved from twitter.com/autumnajirotutu


Crooks, B.A. [thebcchronicles]. (2015, September 1). @AshleyNorth TV is such a tiny glimpse into your lives Ash. The years you’ve been 2gether alone speak volume for the bond the 2 of u have. Retrieved from twitter.com/AshleyNorth


Delight, S. [Skinny_Delight]. (2015, September 30). #WAGs is my guilty pleasure. Make me beautiful, @nataliehalcro @OliviaPierson. Retrieved from twitter.com/nataliehalcro


Gleeson, S. (2017). Tom Brady had concussion last year, his wife Gisele Bundchen says in TV interview. *USA Today*. Retrieved from


Jackson, D. (2015). Twitter vs. Instagram: Which is best for your brand. Retrieved from https://www.bing.com/search?q=what+is+sprout+social&form=EDGEAR&qs=PF&cvid=15b85d51ca684e87b9168565cf6b18f2&cc=US&setlang=en-US&elv=AXXfrEiqqD9r3GuelwApuloqAlO6DyBm03cqziWqv1pszmN0AN5ZmW8YA88HpcLe%21ZCXQfHgEZXULITVGCPUVV9Vb7ju6Lk6iNga*h9X14t1


Lupe. [lxsxvx]. (2016, September 20. I honestly strongly dislike @AutumnAjirotutu on @WAGSonE she’s so condescending, stuck up, and rude. Retrieved from twitter.com/autumnajirotutu


Mojiun, A. [AntoniaMojiun]. (2015, October 6). I just watched @nataliehalcro’s highlighting tutorial. Laughed my ass off when @OliviaPierson made that slap. Retrieved from twitter.com/nataliehalcro


North, A. [AshleyNorth]. (2015, August 20). A man needs a woman with vision. Men who want to be great will except [sic] u to push them & invest in them. @WAGs onE #WAGs. Retrieved from twitter.com/AshleyNorth

North, A. [AshleyNorth]. (2016, March 4). Such an awesome week at the PAO conference! theincrease Can’t wait for next year!! Retrieved from twitter.com/AshleyNorth


Ortiz, Steven M. (2001). How Interviewing Became Therapy for Wives of Professional Athletes: Learning from a serendipitous experience.” *Qualitative Inquiry*


22 Savage. [RegularBlack__]. (2016, July 10). @AutumnAjirotutu I get it girl but everyone doesn’t feel the way you do. You hurt her feelings. You should apologize. Retrieved from twitter.com/autumnajirotutu


Smith, B. [brianbowensmith]. (2015, October 7). #Repost @kevinhart4real…Photo shoot fresh…Shot by @brianbowensmith & Styled by @ashleynorth. Retrieved from twitter.com/AshleyNorth

145
Smith, N. [nelsonsmithCHI]. (2016, July 10). Sometimes I think shows have to create a villain so they edit @WAGSonE to make @AutumnAjirotutu seem mean on purpose smh TV drama. Retrieved from twitter.com/autumnajirotutu


Sovereign Apparel. [SVRGNApparel]. Be strong and courageous, do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go. Joshua 1:9. Retrieved from twitter.com/AshleyNorth


Tian, M. [MeshelayMp]. (2015, September 7). @nataliehalcro Don’t take this the wrong way but you’re THICK! I’m little and thick, & it’s refreshing to see girls like you on TV! Go girl!. Retrieved from twitter.com/nataliehalcro


WAGS on E. [WAGSonE]. (2015, September 9). #WAGs have to be the backbone for their athletes. @AutumnAjirotutu is so strong. Retrieved from twitter.com/autumnajirotutu

WAGS on E. [WAGSonE]. (2015, September 17). Sometimes a drink or two is necessary when conversation topics get touchy. Retrieved from twitter.com/AshleyNorth


Wilson, D. [drwilsonloyal7]. (2015, September 1). OK time out time out…Ashley slow down boo @WAGsonE. Retrieved from twitter.com/AshleyNorth
Wilson, K. [Khris_Wilson]. (2015, September 22). @nataliehalcro is absolutely my fav WAG!
Love what she represents: independence, girl power, & a good time…and still in a relationship #WAGs. Retrieved from twitter.com/nataliehalcro.


Curriculum Vitae
Kaitlyn Millican
Georgiagirl0816@gmail.com

Education

M.A., Communication Studies, May 2018, University of Nevada, Las Vegas, Las Vegas, NV
Thesis advisor: Dr. Tara M. Emmers-Sommer
Committee members: Dr. Erika Engstrom, Dr. Jennifer Guthrie, Dr. David Dickens
Title: “Everyone wants that ring, and I have it”: A content analysis of identity formation on the reality television series WAGs (Wives and Girlfriends of Sports Stars)

B.A., Communication Studies, May 2016, University of Nevada, Las Vegas, Las Vegas, NV
Summa Cum laude
Minor: Marriage and Family Therapy

Awards and Honors

• Dean’s list at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas
• Induction into the National Honor Society (Fall 2013)
• Induction into Lambda Pi Eta Communication Studies Honor Society (Fall 2015)
• Coach for 1st place winner out of 1,000 undergraduate students in the annual speech contest at UNLV (Fall 2017)
• Coach for 1st place winner out of 1,000 undergraduate students in the annual speech contest at UNLV (Fall 2016)
• Judge for COM101 speech contest (Fall 2016, Fall 2017, Spring 2018)

Publications


Teaching Experience

University of Nevada, Las Vegas
Graduate Teaching Assistant
Fall 2016-May 2018

- Experience with teaching the basic course of public speaking for undergraduate students
- Experience teaching small lab classroom environment and large lecture setting
- Responsible for three breakout groups each semester, with 78 undergraduate students total
- Responsible for holding weekly office hours, developing lectures, in-class activities, rubrics, grading of speeches, and classroom management
- Experience with integrating material both in-person and online through WebCampus
- Responsible for creating a comfortable environment for public speaking and three speeches throughout the semester
- Special emphasis placed on facilitating the public speaking process with in-class activities and case studies

University of Nevada, Las Vegas

Part-time Instructor of Record

Summer 2017

- Independently taught Public Speaking to 25 undergraduate students
- Responsible for all curriculum development, syllabus, classroom management,
- Independently responsible for grading oral speeches, written assignments, in-class participation, and developing final and midterm exams
- Experience with teaching the basic course
- Special attention was placed on students with high communication apprehension and facilitating public speaking skills
- Responsible for maintaining and developing online content through WebCampus

Professional Experience

Media Relations Internship
UNLV Athletics
Student Communication Assistant

August 2015-Fall 2016

- Update rosters and Game day media guide
- Interview players for feature story
- Assists with maintenance of UNLVRebels.com
- Update season statistics for specific sport

**Sports Information Director - Tennis**

**January 2016 - Fall 2016**
- Update rosters
- Write weekly preview stories
- Write recaps and post on UNLVRebels.com
- Record/send match scores to ITA and other SID’s

**UNLV School of Social Work**

**Receptionist/Front Desk**

**June 2014 - June 2016**
- Perform office and inventory functions
- Maintain quality customer service
- Effectively communicate with students to solve problems quickly
- Assist faculty with a variety of administrative tasks
- Assist with setup for home events
- Gather post game quotes

**Sales Associate**

**Ross Dress for Less**

**July 2013 - May 2014**
- Manage wide variety of customer service and resolve issues quickly and efficiently
- Perform knowledge of all sections and merchandise to inquiry customers
- Replenish stock of merchandise from stockroom
- Provide superior customer service and handle complaints as they arise

**Community Service Experience**

**Goodie Two Shoes**

**February 2013 – Present**
- Non-profit organization
- Assist poverty stricken children with finding a brand new pair of shoes and socks

**Three Square**

**October 2014 - Present**
- Non-profit organization
- Package and distribute food to families in need

**UNLV DASH**
March 2014
  o  Student organization