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On Your Mark, Get Set, Gender

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On Your Mark, Get Set, Gender! The Politicality of Women in Sports

Senior Project Submitted to
The Division of Social Studies
of Bard College

by
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Annandale-on-Hudson, New York

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An extra-special shout-out to women and girls in sports everywhere, and anyone who has struggled fitting into the sports system, there will be change.

This paper is dedicated to my dad. You are the best coach I've had without knowing a wink about soccer, but you learned to love the game just as much as I do. You are my biggest fan and supporter and I've loved nothing more than to play for you. Not only did you support my sports career, but you are a true feminist tuning in to women's sports each year and showing me they are worthwhile. More people should be like you. I love you, daddy. You are the reason I love sports.

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Table of Contents

Author's Note.....	1
Introduction.....	2
Chapter 1: What Is An Athlete?.....	4
An Athlete Is	
Sex/Gender System.....	6
What Is a Female Athlete?.....	8
Chapter 2: Sport As A Discourse.....	11
What Is Sport	
The Queer And Gender Non-Conforming Athlete.....	18
Sport As An Institution.....	22
Sport As Political.....	25
Chapter 3: Title IX's America.....	29
Title IX	
Quota's And Proportionality.....	46
Sexual Harassment In Title IX.....	54
Chapter 4: Girls, Meet Boys...Now Split.....	55
Gender Segregation	
Chapter 5: Boys Rule, Girls Drool.....	66
Masculinity	
Coaching And Masculinity.....	73
Assault In The Athletic Realm And The Male Fear of Being a Woman.....	75
Chapter 6: Girls Go To College To Get More Knowledge, Boys Go To Jupiter To Get More Stupider.....	82
Femininity	
Co-Ed Sports.....	87
Chapter 7: Youth And College Sports.....	92
Youth Sports	
College Sports.....	95
Chapter 8: External Political Identity.....	95
Feminism	
Activism Within Sport.....	101
Conclusion: Women's Sports Are Women's Rights.....	104
Bibliography.....	107

Author's Note

Before beginning the paper, I would like to acknowledge a few important elements to preface the argument ahead. Language, in terms of gender, is our greatest barrier, and at times, our language lacks terminology for gender in separation from men. My goal, as a scholar, is to explain how that lack of language is an attempt to provide additional language that may not be commonly used in reference to certain groups. I am doing this because I think the scope of our language must be increased to include all beings within it. With that being said, I have tried to employ my words in the best way possible to shelter an inclusive environment. I would forewarn that there are portions where sexual assault and rape are mentioned. I simply discuss the subject matter and do not go into any stories or details. With this understanding, I would remind you that language is a political device and I plan to use it on behalf of women (and other marginalized actors within sport).

Introduction

Women in sport are inherently political. How it manifests, comes about in a series of ways. For example, do a quick Google search on who currently has the most international goals in soccer. Who comes up? Cristiano Ronaldo with 122 goals. An admirable record. Now, do it again, but put the word “woman” in front of most international goals. Who comes up this time? Christine Sinclair with 190 goals. This may be a political thesis, but the math here is incorrect. Sinclair has 68 more goals than Ronaldo. Without the word woman, Sinclair is not recognized for having the most international goals ever recorded in soccer history. There is an unbalanced relationship between women and sport that can be described as political. The female athlete herself is an inherent political actor. Her political identity has come about inadvertently due to the shape of society, which shapes athletics. By political, I mean the institutional role placed upon women before they even begin to compete in sport and categorize themselves as athletes. This is framed through the sex/gender system, which is the theoretical understanding of being sexed and further being gendered through sex assignment. Gender is the applied role when one is being sexed. The systematic American Government and its components shape society and pursue politicality through laws (such as Title IX in relevance to sport.) The United States Court system continues the understanding of how laws should be implemented and is responsible for maintaining or altering them, which is how the laws become politically applied. Since women were not original participants of sport in American society, and global society, how sport is conceptualized today is through separation on the basis of sex. Women and girls were effectively discriminated against, which defines their identity within the institution itself creating a specific political identity. “Woman,” as a category, to begin with, are already discriminated against

therefore, within sport, they continue to face discrimination. The political aspect is that this discrimination has been attempted to be overcome, but the discrimination never truly goes away because “woman” in itself is political and a constructed category. Woman becomes assigned as “not man,” so the category of their conceptualization is not created by women themselves. The key takeaway is due to such factors she, in fact, is political. I plan to explore the relationship as to why the female athlete is political and the role that plays politically, socially, culturally and through various kinds of identity. I will do this by developing an understanding of the politicization of an athlete and specifically a female athlete and the systems that have created the identity as a category beyond the category of woman. Then, I will follow that by investigating how she, as a political being, can become a political actor externally on top of her internal politicization, and how that is interpreted differently by society and culture. In order to understand femininity within sport, I will look into sport as a structure and the relationship it has with masculinity, along with how women interact in sports, in the hopes it will help uncover my sweeping question as to why the female athlete is political. To further identify how women are inherent in their politicality within sport, first define what it is to be an athlete then I will investigate various conceptual systems that contribute to this identity starting with the sex/gender system, which assist in explaining what it means to be a female athlete. In chapter 2, there will be a breakdown of sport and the components that create it, as well as the relationship of queerness and gender-nonconforming identities within sport. It will include discourse on sport as an institution and as a political sect within society in independence from its actors. Following this, the third chapter will consist of the history and criticisms of the pinnacle Education Act: Title IX. I devote an entire section to the systems of compliance, along with a brief section on the birth of sexual

harassment within Title IX. Furthermore, in chapter 4, will focus upon gender segregation and its vital existence in organizing sport as a sect of society. The 5th chapter I will discuss sports' relationship to masculinity and power. Next femininity will be discussed, as well as a section devoted to co-ed sports and what they look like and can look like. To follow femininity, the topic of youth and collegiate sports, and how it acts as a method of exploitation within sport against youth and young adult actors are discovered. The final chapter will return back to the political and explore the implications of feminism upon female athletes, as well as activism within the athletics realm. From there, I will conclude my argument ascribing the woman athlete as an inherently political being.

Chapter 1: What Is An Athlete?

An Athlete Is...

The *New Oxford American Dictionary* defines an athlete as “a person who is proficient in sports and other forms of physical exercise: *he had the broad-shouldered build of a natural athlete.*”¹ An athlete is exceptional at physical activity and specializes in specific forms of it. Notice that the example given implies that an athlete is a man. There is no indication that an athlete can be a “she” (or any other gender, for that matter) in this definition. Implying that an athlete can be she (or any non-male pronoun) means there is an acknowledgment that women have the capability to do what men can do athletically or even beyond. It also implies they maintain a difference and are bound to their exclusion categorized as “not men.” Women are defined by their sex first and foremost, and not as athletes. The very definition doesn't seem to acknowledge there is a plurality as to what makes an athlete. A man can be assumed as an athlete

¹ Angus Stevenson and Christine A. Lindberg, eds., *New Oxford American Dictionary* (Oxford University Press, 2011), <https://>.

without indication of gender, but a woman is a woman first before she can even be considered an athlete. This concept is called being sexed and in an athletic sphere, women are sexed to the farthest capacity. How she is perceived is the female athlete's greatest barrier. An example of how sport accomplishment is sexed is how records are regarded. The male record is the one that counts and is praised/publicized, as shown in the initial example with Ronaldo and Sinclair. The female athlete as a figure carries a form of politicality, especially through her sexed body, that the male athlete does not, strictly by definition. Bodies are a central component of being an athlete, but the body as a gendered space is what ultimately defines and separates male and female athletes and can exclude intersex, trans, and non-binary athletes, which can be referred to as genderqueer. The definition of genderqueer is “individuals with fluid, shifting, or flexible gender expression and/or people who do not identify as male or female. Also referred to as non-binary, gender fluid, or gender non-conforming.”² This definition does not apply to every and all persons who may have a fluid or shifting identity, but it is a helpful term in understanding the modern language surrounding gender that sits outside of the binary. This too has a relationship with the concept of being sexed, and is separated beyond the categories of male vs. female. Since the difference of body is the strategy of sex separation in sports it places more emphasis on the female athlete because her life, as a gendered entity of her sex, in this scenario, does not qualify her as a man through physical attributes such as her lack of male attributes. In reality, that difference just changes the parameters of what an athlete is rather than defining what an athlete can be.

² Vikki Krane, ed., *Sex, Gender, and Sexuality in Sport: Queer Inquiries*, 2019. 242.

Sex/Gender System

The backbone of sports society depends largely on its adherence to the sex/gender system. I will explain the significance of the sex/gender system, which dictates Western society, and in turn, carries into the field of sport. Language is a clear precursor to sorting certain characteristics (as seen when defining an athlete). Sex, is our initial categorization with the two options being male and female, despite there being a series of abnormalities that are not that abnormal, and quite common, as many people are unaware that this may affect them. These lines blur and are not quite intersex. (Intersex is a biological combination of the sexes present in a person.) We have formulated language in which we continue to perpetuate such a category. We do this by gendering. When one genders, they require language to reinstitute the category in which they are speaking about. In sports, the insult “throw like a girl” is commonly used in a demeaning manner, which associates gender roles with sex. The language we use serves as a category to sort these specific characteristics. In the example above, sex is grouped with gender as one thing, and the association is that women are weaker in their very existence not only in sport, but in society. The act of this sorting is political and the language serves as the structure for those in power to maintain power. Addressing discrimination statutes/legislation adheres to a gendered structure as it has been carried out continuing through the present. Those in power push sex categories as a norm coupled with the gendered associations and form what is referred to as the sex/gender system. The formation of gender is now already decided by sex as a result of language being used as a political device. Gender is political and cultural (as is sport), and is defined by sex, therefore sport perpetuates the doctrine. The category of sex was created to push. The biggest fear is that sex will be separated from gender and the sex/gender system will be

revealed as the construct that it is. Not only is the binary controlled by pushing sex to equate gender, it is also determined to be hegemonic. Hegemony is the idea that a heterosexual society is desired by those with the dominant power as the influence to guide society lifestyle. Rigid gender roles make it much harder for women to advance their abilities in relation to their bodies.³ In sports, for example, athletes are expected to perform with the tools they have been given, which includes their sex and gender characteristics. In a movement such as feminism, it is supposed to be organized under women's shared universal experience of oppression, but universality does not truly exist as it ideally should due to factors such as race, class, government regimes, sexuality, etc... Thus, feminism in the male-dominated world we live in is "effectively undermined by the constraints of the representational discourse in which it functions."⁴ Until society is essentially overthrown from its masculine normality, gender roles cannot be broken, and movements such as feminism cannot operate in an effective way in any given sect. It is created on shared oppression that exists unbalanced because the oppression women and other marginalized people face is so diverse and complex through various structures of power. To the male sex, sex is power in all definitions of the word. To be feminine is to accept that understanding. To be a feminist, there is an element of acceptance of the sex/gender system in order to perpetuate it as a political movement, even if it actively constricts women and people who identify in other gender categories. In regards to Title IX, the key feminist actors that pushed for the law leaned into Judith Butler's sex/gender binary argument by stating what it should avoid, which further indoctrinates Title IX into our gendered society, rather than

³ Elaine M. Blinde, Diane E. Taub, and Lingling Han, "Sport Participation and Women's Personal Empowerment: Experiences of the College Athlete," *Journal of Sport and Social Issues* 17, no. 1 (April 1, 1993): 47–60, <https://doi.org/10.1177/019372359301700107>. 47

⁴ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, Routledge Classics (New York: Routledge, 2006), 6.

overcoming it. The ideology of these feminists boxed the sex/gender system up and pushed out the “correct” gender conceptualization to apply to sport. The category must be accepted, so when we accept it how are we supposed to overcome it? Athletes who embrace their identity as women are tasked with a difficult assignment: exist within a system that is categorized on the basis of sex and enforced by gender. Are they supposed to break free and flip the system or do they embrace it and work from the inside out? I plan to investigate this question based on the understanding that the sex/gender system is a political one, therefore, equating women athletes as political beings through their very existence.

What Is A Female Athlete?

The female athlete, in practice, is inherently a political figure. What I mean by this is that once a woman becomes an athlete, she is charged with characteristics that define her as political. This comes down to her action of participating, playing, and competing in sport. This includes the structures in which sport is conducted, as well as how it is perceived by society. Beyond her inherent political being, she can become a political actor by completing actions that may be forms of activism or protest. Any form of activism is an external form of politicality that is not taken into account through her definition as political. It is a tacked-on identity after the foundation of politicality has already been set. The female athlete can be inherently political by “nature” without being a political actor, but she can’t be a political actor without the indoctrination of the sex/gender system, thus bounding her to the binary, therefore, the political. Nature is often used synonymously with biology, and how anatomy signifies gender in sports which is the justification for the sex/gender system itself. Success in sport is categorized as masculine through the attention of speed, strength, toughness, and aggression to name a few

attributes, which are associated with men's biology. In turn, are defined by parameters of gender difference from the female sex. The sex/gender system is the organization of one's gender based upon their sex, and the roles that have been assigned by society. Sex is based on the biological makeup of a person assigned at birth. When defining a female athlete, it is assumed as so through her biology which is interpreted as natural because of the social construction of gender.

“Natural” within sport specifically acts as an extension to the earlier definition, and hinders on female biological capabilities within the makeup of the female sex; It is performed in diverse ways per body, per sport, and per woman. The social construct is a political mechanism that remains in place through socialization to maintain sex as defining one's gender. From an anatomical perspective, there is truth to some elements of a supposedly natural difference between men and women, but should that define each and every structure in which we live, including sports? On the basis of sex, women, and men do have differences. The system in which we live bases that difference from male as the starting point. The word to define our species is humanity, which shows male to be the focal point of our society and is so deeply intertwined with what we have become today. Being a woman is defined as being “non-male” and that assumption is enforced by gender, thus perpetuating the sex/gender system in which men are dominant. Further, they remain dominant because it is framed by “nature” to build our social structure and to perpetuate such differences in a permanent manner. Though these differences exist, and can have some impact on how each person within their sex performs, it should not be the basis in which we evaluate female athletes' or genderqueer peoples' accomplishments. In terms of sports as a structure within the sex/gender system, the biology of a male is how success is measured regardless of differences. Women are then judged by that standard and expected to

perform as close as they can to the male standard. If women are being judged athletically by the male basis with no account to female biology, then they are set up to fail due to how we conceptualize sport which is refined through gender and inevitably, by sex. Gender itself is political. If we account for the role it has in society, it is clear that it touches every corner. Because gender is political, specifically the female sex, which is associated with the label of woman, it is scrutinized as not male, therefore the female athlete herself is a political figure through her existence.

When thinking of what a political athlete may be, it is assumed to be someone who uses their platform to promote a specific cause or ideology. For the female athlete, being present is already a political statement because it diverges from the idea of what an athlete is and what they can do. The female athlete may go a step further and utilize her political being and actively choose to express a political agenda, such as feminism. When it comes to feminist thinking in regard to sport, there are many factors that contribute to that title being plausible or not. This doesn't mean that female athletes themselves are feminists or even can be in congruence with the structures of feminism due to their sport participation by default. Gender roles have a part to play in why feminism may deny sports as part of the movement, or with the movement. Tacking on "feminist" to "female athlete" can alter her political meaning beyond the one she is in in the first place. The female athlete is a unique being within society and is often quite similar across societies. Of course, there is a plurality to her politicality. The female athlete is not just one thing, but can take on endless shapes and forms, nevertheless, she still is a specific identity that is at odds within sport itself.

Chapter 2: Sport As A Discourse

What Is Sport?

In order to really pull back all the layers of the athlete and by extension, the female athlete, I would like to begin with sport as a concept. Understanding what sport is will help identify why a woman has a different role, and political role than another who participates in such a practice. Sports is a physical leisure hobby, and at its core, is frivolous while being based upon the ideals of a meritocracy. By this I mean, it is not do or die in the sense of an issue like world hunger is. However, sports have a direct impact politically in how it is structured and through those who participate within it. One element that is central to sport is one's relationship with their body, and the body to sport itself. The body can be political, but before it can be considered political, it must be considered for the importance it has for an individual athlete within the greater organized structure. Scholars who focus on sports studies often associate sports with its relationship to the body. Sociologist Sheryl L. Cole states, "sport remains a particularly powerful ideological mechanism because it is centered on the body, a semiotic condensation whose whole manifest meaning is bound to the biological."⁵ Sport as an activity is required to have physical input therefore, arguments that lie within their biological connection, when it comes to women's participation, have some validity. It is the argument that pushes organized sports at all levels to be separated by gender. Through the idea of biology, women are viewed as lesser based on their physical output in comparison to male athletes. This is most notable through time qualifications in track and field. The male times are faster than the female times due to biology. This allows for women to be viewed as lesser due to their differences from

⁵ Cheryl L. Cole, "Resisting the Canon: Feminist Cultural Studies, Sport, and Technologies of the Body," in *Women, Sport, and Culture*, ed. Susan Birrell and Cheryl L. Cole (Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics, 1994), 5-29. 15

men, not their abilities as women. Biologically, those abilities are simply different from those of men. So if we are going to utilize a Freudian discourse that “anatomy is destiny,” then the world of sports should lean into female difference as exceptionalism, rather than minimize it through its difference. In fact, women excel at endurance sports more than men. This is true of running and especially swimming, due to a wider pelvic floor and more mobile hips, along with more flexibility and plasticity. There are many other attributes that are strictly female within biology. Those I just mentioned are the most common examples associated with the feminine. The sport and body combination is at odds with some feminist discourse that pushes for the separation of women and their relationship with their bodies. This is because the athlete’s body is tied to the male-dominated institution of sports. I would argue that embracing the “curse of biology,” in terms of sports, is exactly what the male sports institution is afraid of. Sports would not exist without its most important component, which are the athletes and the sheer function of their bodies.

In sports, there is no greater central actor than the body of an athlete. For women, the relationship with biology is often the main structure of oppression because “the female body can be understood as more docile, malleable, and impressionable than the masculine body.”⁶ It is political about how a woman’s body looks and how it should look, including in athletics. If anything, athletes who are women have a heightened lens on their bodies. The politicality of a female athlete's body may differ per sport based upon the needs required for success. The implication of body politics exists for all athletes regardless of identity.⁷ It can be argued that the

⁶ Cheryl L. Cole, “Resisting the Canon: Feminist Cultural Studies, Sport, and Technologies of the Body,” 16

⁷ Susan Bordo, *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993). “Material Girl” The Effacement...”, 253

relationship with the body of the female athlete can counter what society has placed upon the body of a woman. Both identities are viewed as separate entities, in spite of having the woman in common. The setting of the body is what complicates the current state of female body politics. Some feminists believe that sport is “transgressive” for female bodies and the fight for achieving equality.⁸ Such a critique fails to acknowledge the importance of women being present in the first place. Of course, having a body is central to everyone’s identity on the planet, but to an athlete, their body is the currency to success. Much like prostitution or modeling, the body and what is done with it, is a commodity. It’s required that it is marketable regardless of what stage it’s on (which includes youth sports). For example, what men offer to the market is their domineering privilege and their biological properties. Because they are the class of people who have constructed this idea, they then have the opportunity to push the boundaries of what that may be. Heterosexual whiteness is the current perceived ideal. Many other kinds of men exist and may face identity-based issues, but at the end of the day, there is still privilege in being a man within sport. Since the United States is a hegemonic society, straightness is emphasized in all aspects of it, especially in sport because of the centrality of the body to the activity. Women are now indoctrinated actors in sport and are then required to replicate the hegemonic identity in their sports participation. Because they are women, they are expected to replicate it in the feminized role that society has constructed for them. They not only must be in tune with their feminized role, but maintain their eroticized nature.⁹ This means, in their very existence, they are required to not only be narrowed down to their biological sex, but to the gender roles that society assigns to the female sex. Sports women become not only members of the sport structure but must

⁸ Cheryl L. Cole, “Resisting the Canon: Feminist Cultural Studies, Sport, and Technologies of the Body,” 15.

⁹ Bordo, “Material Girl”: The Effacements of Postmodern Culture.” 253.

execute “womanhood” in the performance of their sport in all regards, despite facing backlash for participating in the first place.

In all regards, this is political and central to the female athlete identity. To be a woman in sport is to be disconnected with the female body because sports are not considered feminine and if women are present, then they ought to look and act a certain way to be accepted by a community that unequivocally doesn't accept them on the basis of biology. Further, it binds them to their assigned gender role, which equates to the institutional structure of athletics. This is an issue that white men (and most men within sports) do not face. Athletes of color, of all genders, face this issue as well, but gender can be demeaning to women in a way that race can be to men. Women of color face the marginalization of both issues, which keeps them suppressed, especially in sport. They maintain a greater level of politicality on the basis of their racialized and gendered identity. The addition of gender forces female athletes of color to have to try twice as hard to get by, which men of color and white women do not have to face in their own respect. Women of all identities are pressed to the idea that “to succeed as an athlete is to fail as a woman, because she has, in certain profound symbolic ways, become a man.”¹⁰ Men are considered simply athletes, but women athletes must be prefaced as female first, and the risk of becoming an athlete is that the identity label of woman, in turn, female, will be unjust. When a woman becomes an athlete, there is an element of her feminine identity that is lost, therefore in her performance of her sport, she must engage her femininity or she remains invisible and separated from her womanness. She must balance being the woman society wants her to be while being the athlete she wants to be.

¹⁰ Paul Willis, “Women in Sport Ideology,” in *Women, Sport, and Culture*, ed. Susan Birrell and Cheryl L. Cole (Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics, 1994), 31–45. Willis, 1994, 36

There is privilege in this on the basis of gender identity, race, class, sexual identity, and type of sport.

In terms of women's lesser value in sports, especially biologically, is that the attributes that women have over men are ignored, and not valued in popular sports or the rules prohibit women in succeeding based upon their biological advantages. The female body has become contested ideologically because of their presence in sports. Pivotal French feminist Simone De Beauvoir argues that "women simply are not men... surely women is, like man, a human being; but such a declaration is abstract. The fact that every concrete human being is always singular, separate, individual."¹¹ It is clear that women are in fact human, but how is it that we define human, and what is the natural state of that are existential questions that come with thinking about sex and the naturality of it. Since sports directly has an intimate relationship with sex itself, the biological basis and the ideas of the natural that come with it in organized sport promotes the expansion of gender indifference. How a woman looks when she is playing sports has become an important factor, especially in regard to the media. American women and their relationship with femininity is pushed into their sense of identity regardless of how they identify with it as individuals. How commentators, coaches, fans, and even haters view female athletes' bodies has become a staple to women's participation in sports.

Since the indoctrination of Title IX in 1972, the breakthrough act for women in sports that is based upon sex, the ideal female body type has shrunk, while the male body type has gotten bigger. Not only do women have to prove themselves as legitimate actors in sport, but they must also appeal to men sexually. She must exist in relation to a man to even be considered

¹¹ Simone de Beauvoir, Constance Borde, and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier, "Introduction," in *The Second Sex*, 1st American ed (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2010).

a sexual being because if she is separated from man, then she is categorized as lesbian which diverges from the desired hegemonic normalcy of American society. This is an issue that male athletes seldom have to deal with. That is not to say that male athletes are not sexualized, because they are, but the male physique and the diverse forms it can take is more accepted in society and specifically in athletics in a way that female bodies don't relate to. When women become stronger, often the lingering question is whether they achieved this naturally, especially at the higher levels of sport, since female strength and the muscles that come with that appeared abnormal. This is due to the normalization of the way women, and women who are athletes are supposed to look. The argument of nature positions itself as "the common use of man to designate human beings in general; whereas women represents only the negative, defined by limiting criteria, without reciprocity."¹² If men are the norm, then anything that isn't man diverges from it, especially in places where sex is emphasized, such as within sport. For example, institutionally, performance-enhancing drug use in sports has historically targeted women first. When a woman performs well, her femininity is taken into question because the structure of sports has been taught that women's difference is a representation of her inferiority in comparison to men. Questions of women's achievements become questions on naturalness. Throughout women's existence within sports, their bodies and the abilities they possess have been taken into question, especially in the biggest institutional domains such as the Olympics. As long as women have been participating in sports, they have been tested upon their female-ness. Due to the level of value that the binary system holds within sports, testing points out the various abnormalities within sex, which are not as abnormal as we may think. There are many ways in

¹² De Beauvoir, "Introduction." 243.

which sex crosses borders and melds to a combination of both, meaning even before the label of intersex can be applied. It was only in 2000 that the International Olympic Committee stopped testing women, and evidently found no men in this process posing as women to get ahead. Instead, the testing was invasive and at the expense of the female athlete's body to justify them as legitimate.¹³ One of the most obvious differences associated with females are their menstrual cycles and their uterus. Femininity is presented as weak in terms of biology and socially (how we define biology is also a social mechanism of women's naturalness) and "by locating feminine weakness in the womb, men (who had no equivalent body part) were exempt from faults that, biologically speaking, could only belong to a woman."¹⁴ Both facts (to some extent) and social examples frame women as incompetent wombs and not even people attached to those wombs. There is a long history of narrowing women to their biological capacities and removing their humanity to do so. It is plausible that this inference is to be made in a sports context as well. The ruling male class creates the politics of the body, especially the female sexed body and its relationship to sports as an institution.

Athletic strength is prevalent in American culture and if woman can play a sport, and if she can play it better than a man, then it can't be an argument for masculinity in both a literal and symbolic way. Athletes repossess their body and mold it to perfect their sport regardless of any identifying category. At its core, athletics has a direct relationship with the body, which is why it is so intertwined with the culture, as every person has a body and has athletic experience in some way with their body. When women's bodies enter the athletic sphere "a woman's athletic training, regardless of the factors that lead to her involvement, implicitly challenges patriarchal

¹³Eileen McDonagh and Laura Pappano, *Playing With the Boys: Why Separate Is Not Equal in Sports*, 2009. 46.

¹⁴McDonagh & Pappano, "Playing With the Boys..." 165.

constraints on her behavior.”¹⁵ The use of her body in sports becomes a reflection of her behavior, which is political in the sense that she will take the entire sports sphere away from men simply by entering and being present in the institution of sports.

The Queer And Gender-Non-Conforming Athlete

In addition to considering body and gender in terms of sports, sexuality, queerness, and gender-nonconformity are quite relevant. Not unlike the role of other marginalized identities in sport, the atmosphere of athletics is also intolerant to queerness. Over time, this has improved, but it still remains an obstacle. A commonplace of tension within sport now is the relationship to trans and gender non-conforming people. The media is an actor in perpetuating negative and stigmatized images, which makes it difficult for the next generation to access themselves in a positive way and deters other marginalized athletes. The term “Queer” is an important categorization to be utilized and it can be used ambiguously as an umbrella term for various identities that fit within the LGBTIQ¹⁶ category.¹⁷ The formal definition of queer as follows is, “a term describing all members of the LGBTIQ community (or people who are not heterosexual). It includes people with minoritized sex, sexual, and gender identities. The term is not embraced by all LGBTIQ people, but may be adopted by some as an identity or political expression to confront heteronormativity.”¹⁸ The reason as to why some may be hesitant to utilize the term is that it may hint at erasure within the community, meaning certain identities may be minimized to emphasize the greater community. At times that may not be helpful when a specific identity of people are trying to overcome an issue that affects their individual community directly. What is

¹⁵ Mariah Burton Nelson, *The Stronger Women Get, The More Men Love Football*, 2001. Burton Nelson, 2001, 30.

¹⁶ Standing for: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Intersex and Queer/Questioning

¹⁷ Krane, *Sex, Gender, and Sexuality in Sport...*, 7.

¹⁸ Krane. 246.

distinctive about the LGBTIQ community is the diversity of identities that are within it and that are represented. Even in gayness (and the various LGBTIQ identities), whiteness is prioritized even though they are still marginalized to some capacity, their race still privileges them where others don't have the same luxury. An LGBTIQ identity can be masked, despite the harm it may cause to the individual, but race cannot. It is especially helpful when athletes can look and act the part and highly difficult if they can't, which is why race is a complicated identity to occupy, especially if it is only one component of identity. Queerness in athletics is not an element limited simply to women's sport. The relationship with queerness in men's sports can arguably be described as more complex, but overall sports share homonegativism.¹⁹ There is quite the paradox present with queerness in sports.²⁰ For example, when women are too masculine they are called "gay" as an insult, as they go against the grain of hegemony, but male athletes who express homoerotic behavior are just being "men."²¹ Not only does sexuality get taken into account in this example, but so does the role of gender within sports. Both men and women are expected to express certain gender behaviors to confirm their assigned biological gender. When I refer to gender-queerness or non-males I am referring to anyone who does not sit within the sex/gender binary system. It can be difficult to include all marginalized gender identities, at once, but it should be assumed that I am referring to as many that apply when they are discussed. Any form of non-conformity to strict gender roles is viewed as hostile within the sports community.²²

¹⁹ Krane, 2.

²⁰ The gay male athlete faces more of a taboo within society because of sports relationship with straight and male-ness as a hegemonic entity. Queerness is more accepted in women's sports since they are marginalized figures, but this relationship is highly stigmatized for men and is a much complicated issue that cannot be discussed in as much detail here.

²¹ Being gay is different than expressing homoerotic behavior in a heteronormative environment because the homoeroticism is justified because women are present in theory, and cancels out any accusations of gayness. This concept is commonly referred to as homosexuality.

²² Krane, 5.

Non-binary athletes specifically may not be compelled to align themselves with either sex identity because they find themselves to be connected to a specific gender identity rather than a specific sex. Additionally, trans athletes may want to align with their gender but may be forced to participate with their assigned sex at birth, which is abnormal in the world of sports. Identity is fixed and stable within society. Social positions within society are as a result of ignoring the marginalized, as “standpoints are generated by group consciousness that occurs via collective political (power) struggle due to claiming a marginalized identity.”²³ There are dualities of experience, and each has a specific identity, but that is not an excuse to not cater to identity. One thing about sexuality within sports is that it can be masked, as they still fit within the binary that way, which puts these athletes above trans athletes, and athletes of color, in terms of athletic recognition.²⁴ Trans is viewed as a third party and trans athletes become stripped of their identity because of it. Within the trans community, there are two different ways in which individuals enter their identities. The first is gender transformers, who go about changing not only their identity but the physical attributes of their true identities. This means they are willing to use hormones and undergo surgery to affirm their identity, while the second trans identity is called gender conformers because they affirm their gender identity without altering their bodies in a biological manner.²⁵ Each identity takes a different form in life and within sports. Some believe that the gender performers pose an unfair advantage in participating in sport. Another element to this debacle is that trans judgment is sexed, meaning within the media, it is more common to hear about trans women in sport, rather than trans men. Trans women, especially gender performing trans women are considered a threat to female sports because their biological identity

²³ Krane, 17.

²⁴ Krane, 26.

²⁵ Krane, 24.

differs from their presenting identity. The issue here is that there is bias in judgment and the debate without accounting for all aspects of it, which are necessary when forging legislation. Trans athletes despite how they present are still athletes and like cis gender²⁶ women should not have that separated from their identity.

Queering in sports allows for constant interrogation of sport and its institution, and can be used as a strategy to make room for others. Queering sport not only helps those part of the queer community but all marginalized figures as it opens up dialogue and visibility for them as well, because you cannot have one without the other.²⁷ Feminism within sports interlocks with queerness and sports and often pull from the same ideologies to achieve their political goals. The concept of queerness can assist an intersectional feminist agenda which extends to all identities rather than just the one that is accepted.

The most important element of sport that is often forgotten is that it is more than professional and elite college sports. There is the whole world of youth sport and amateur/recreational sport. In fact, 90-95% of sports are played by non-professionals.²⁸ When there is outcry for injustice at the professional level it is visible. Sports that may not be seen by the public face the greatest injustice because the majority of sports are invisible to the general public. Applying professional standards to sports that are far from that minimizes the diversity that sport offers that may not be present at the highest level. Recognizing athletes of color, queer, genderqueer, trans, intersex and non-binary athletes does not exclusively apply to high-level sports, but the lowest levels of inclusion. The system of sports in which it stands replicates the constraint of the current political system and encourages systemic oppression. To overcome

²⁶ Cisgender meaning the biological sex matches the persons' gender.

²⁷ Krane, 29.

²⁸ Krane, 229.

means to rebuild the entire system from the ground up, but that is not a process that begins overnight. It requires small steps into bigger strides to even get close. In looking into the various structures that make up sports, within there is a dire need to expand. For example, Title IX does not apply to athletes unless they are women, and at that it assists mostly white women. Gender and Sexuality scholar Vikki Krane argues that, “given the current hegemonic state of affairs in sport fairness can only be obtained by dismantling the current power structures in sport.”²⁹

Dismantling and then rebuilding sports to include those that are left out in the current system sounds radical, but required. The youth level should be considered as the start for rebuilding from the ground up. They will carry precedence as they age out of each system structure.

Sport As An Institution

In order for one to become an athlete, especially one that is professional, there needs to be an established relationship with an institution, e.g. a club or national team/organization. This relationship maintains the current system in place, as sport itself has developed as an institutional entity itself. Sport continues to operate because it is an institution that supplies laborers, in this case, athletes, along with the many others that create the system in which the athlete plays. It is a commercial business that utilizes masculine social norms to make money. It's multifaceted within the commercial industry as well. Sports continue to dominate economically because of where they are situated culturally. Sport is embedded in culture and at times can define it. Growing civil rights movements throughout history were present within sports. Civil rights was situated within baseball when the first Black athletes attempted to integrate. Because of its cultural impact, sport appears as untouchable and “the way sports permeates all areas of

²⁹ Krane, 226.

American life and the way sports in America shapes values outside of the athletic realm, however, means that gender inequality in sports is as fundamental a problem demanding policy correction as the way education, employment, and other key factors to achieve for women equality with men.”³⁰ The American institution of politics shapes the way in which the sports institution is made up, which in turn helps define the culture. Sport in turn relies upon this which creates the institution as we know it, directly affecting every person involved. This means the popular athletic figures are also embedded in the politicality of sports and can be overestimated with their relationship to politics. There is more visibility to sports and accessibility, especially across all ages than politics are within the country, which is why it holds so much power as an institution not only for entertainment and economic benefits but for politics and culture itself. They matter because “they offer a readily understood image of success and convey social values we can all agree on.”³¹ Society is painted to be a meritocracy, just as sport is. Since sports hold an uncontested place in society, they are often perceived as a mirror of society's rises and downfalls from a political perspective. Sports values do not reflect gender equitable values to women and other marginalized actors as is prevalent in greater society. To signify the legitimacy of the institution as a male dominated one is to design systems of sport that remind women (and all other marginalized figures) of their subordination. It becomes built within the system. Sport should ideally be viewed as neutral, and have no direct requirement to be a male dominated domain. Unfortunately, to many women, this can have a negative association because they are not included in the image of success in the way powerhouse-male athletes and the institutional leagues they are connected to are. This concept removes women from the equation because they

³⁰ Mcdonagh & Pappano, 235.

³¹ Mcdonagh & Pappano, 228.

are not viewed as part of the recipe for such commercial success. When the same model is applied to women it inevitably backfires because they were never accounted for within sport as an institution to begin with. Adding them into the same model minimizes their autonomy as athletes and as athletes that are different from the masculine norm, which is not negative. It pursues the illusion that men's sports are the official form of sport while women's sports are experimental, and not reputable in the same vein. Women's athletic abilities get minimized to their sex and are bound to the gender stereotypes of their sex, while men have sports catered to their gender identity rather than just their sex. This defines a lot of what I argue as their inherent political identity. The impact of the American patriarchal society has created a long lasting disparity that's ingrained within the system before women even had the chance to step into the arena. Patriarchy is referring to the systematic dominance of masculinity within a given society. Sports replicate political power within society. If a hierarchical structure is in place then the concept is repeated within sports to mirror political society because "the manner in which we structure sports in our society has consequences at once deeply personal and broadly political."³² Playing sports is a social institution as a product of patriarchal ideals of the West that propel female subordination and male domination in the American context.

At the heart of sports as an institution is the ethos that makes up such a system. In the ethos of sport winning is everything, and winning in sports can relate to winning in life as well. Traditional conceptions of a gendered and sexed society are replicated within sport, so the ways in which change ensues also replicate the ethos despite trying to diverge itself from it. The system of sport and ethos of sport are not one without the other. A core concept of sport is its

³² Mcdonagh & Pappano, 37.

rules, and the ethos that make up each sport. Within those rules there are social values attached which can include gender among other factors. The replication of rules perpetuates a specific moral value tied to a specific sport that is at the crux of how it operates. The biggest core feature of sport ethos is the concept of hard work and how they are categorized as a meritocracy. It is central to success and what sets apart winners and losers, as within sports not everyone can win. Due to the centrality to competition, and the unbalance of a winner vs. a loser, sport is a “force for modernization that could shape cultural attitudes... [it’s] leisure both for the masses, and, separately for the elites—offered those influential in governing sports the power to shape not just a game but a society”³³ From a fan perspective, which perpetuates sport as such a vital system within the culture of society, sports can be understood by everyone theoretically, regardless of age, race, gender and identity. Since sport is a replication of the power structure it is present, even within the fanbase. It is geared toward men and they are the only ones who theoretically are supposed to understand it, even though it exists in a larger social existence, and with the followers of such a system that are not men. Sports are more than play, more than an idealized concept, but a very part of us and the society we live in. The power sport holds over the culture of society can be just as strong as politics and often can even align.

Sport As Political

Sport is inherently political. Since sport is only a portion to American society at large it participates in the replication of the political system. Within such a system, hierarchy is present that pushes the systemic make-up of the American government, and the many other sects that also replicate the political system. Feminist philosopher Audre Lorde describes the American

³³ Mcdonagh & Pappano, 157.

way of systematic oppression “as American as apple pie.”³⁴ Oppression is core to American politics, and therefore sports, like sports that replicate the makeup of such politics. The way in which sport operates “can be used to construct—and–deconstruct race and sex hierarchies. As such, sports is much more than facts; it is also an arena for establishing—or challenging—the meanings associated with race and sex differences.”³⁵ Sport acts as a site that reinforces the power structure. The origins of sport as it exists today is due to the industrial boom. Those who were most commonly industrial workers were men, so men were in environments where they could socialize with other men, and play sports with other men. As the number of workers increased, and industrialization expanded there was more need for immigrants to be industrial workers and the way to indoctrinate them in American culture was sports. As urbanization came with industry, parks, as well as the emphasis of recreational sports were now a staple of the male workforce, which was a large component of society at large. Modern development not only altered how business operated, but it altered recreation which in turn births the modern rendition of what sport is to society. Sports becoming more established created rules and such rules were connected to the politicality of the era. Prior, and through the Jim Crow era, sports created rules that pushed segregation and racial exclusion. While this was happening, African-American athletes were exceling, and at the highest levels like Jesse Owens’ in the Olympics in Munich, Germany in the midst of World War II looming. Events like these showcased African-American men as developed athletes and earned them credit to participate with white men. Of course there were exceptions such as The Commanders (formerly known as The Redskins) owner in 1962

³⁴ Audre Lorde, “Age, Race, Class, and Sex : Women Redefining Difference,” in *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*, Revised edition, The Crossing Press Feminist Series (Berkeley: Crossing Press, 2007).

³⁵ Mcdonagh & Pappano, 154.

who bragged about having an all white team.³⁶ Black men were able to push through and be granted the right to participate amongst white men in the sports realm. Though there are still racial issues that plague men's sports that are ingrained within the institution of sport, women have faced more difficulty surpassing prejudices, especially women of color and other further marginalized identities.

Sport can be used as a way to reach social equality, as well as representing power. American society has leaned on sport and its impact in politics for a long time. Sport could not only gender within their own policies as a political tool, but they directly manipulate international politics. For example, sport can act as a skilled diplomat. In the Cold War, it was evident that Russian women were out performing American women in global competition, so President Eisenhower poured federal tools to encourage women to compete, not for their gain, but for an underlying political goal to show up the Russians and paint America as the Superpower of the world. Of course this came at a price for women as they could compete but had to adhere to the feminine. They had to be "female, first, athletes second."³⁷ Sports have power but power that can be manipulated. Athletics can be seen as a place to challenge inequality. It can be a tool to mimic political associations. On one hand, it can represent conservative ideals of tradition, but at the same time, it can represent transformation and forward change. Scholars McDonagh & Pappano call this concept the paradox of sports.³⁸ What sports are played, as well as how they are played reflects the inequalities within American society. For example, "sports spaces maintain and reinforce the heterosexual matrix through its separate but

³⁶ McDonagh & Pappano, 164. President John F. Kennedy actually threatened the owner to include black men because the stadium was built on federal land, therefore his exclusion of Black athletes went directly against the 14th Amendment's Equal Protection Clause.

³⁷ McDonagh & Pappano, 205.

³⁸ McDonagh & Pappano, 191.

equal sex segregation of sport, as well as policies about participation of transgender and intersex people in sport.”³⁹ There is not just one way in which sport manipulates its power, but leaning into heteronormativity within culture is one. Sport in itself is the representation of politics as a part of culture and challenges underlying political conditions that exist in greater society. Sport can bring those conditions to light and take form to adhere to its own structure, but not independent to American politics. There is a power to sport within American society and within American politics, as it can act as a form of political currency, as it did for Eisenhower during the Cold War. Women play a distinct role within such a culture. Women within American society occupied a more submissive role, willingly and not. Women for as long as they have existed have played a political role in whatever society they appear within (which is pretty much all of society). It makes sense that as sport grew so did women’s political place within it. Regardless of what sphere women are within, they bring politicality to it, and most often not by choice, just as a result of their being. In terms of sports directly, “women have beaten or out-performed men, but rather than yielding recognition of female power, such results have spurred suppression.”⁴⁰ The social role of women within the American political structure dictates how they are treated in the sport structure. Sports are the most sex segregated secular institution in America. When we discuss Title IX as a big moment in sports for women, it too was and is a huge moment in American politics that spreads farther within society than what may meet the eye. I will frame the next proportion of my argument through the role that Title IX plays in women’s sports and most importantly within political society.

³⁹ Krane, 16.

⁴⁰ Mcdonagh & Pappano, 195.

Chapter 3: Title IX's America And The Conception Of Women In Sport

Title IX

American women's sports is always said to have begun in 1972, the year Title IX was passed. Of course this isn't true, as women have been playing sports as long as men have, they were just forced to in private. In fact, prior to Title IX's passing was the biggest boom of sports participation by girls and women. In 1972, women were now able to be public athletic figures. In American society, women are regarded as private figures bound to the home while men are the public figures that made money and socialized outside the realm of the home. Little by little, over the 20th century, women slowly began to enter the public realm of society and assimilation in hegemonic culture beyond the domestic. Alas, "the powerful belief that males and females occupied distinct realms—hers the domestic, his the public—provided a necessary structure to society and protected the purity of the home. To mix the sexes, to breach the separate spheres, threatened the natural order."⁴¹ A new order of society meant a new order for sport that allowed women to play. They had the opportunity to participate within the institutionalized system men have had the luxury to enjoy since it began. As groundbreaking as the act itself was and still is, President Nixon was unhappy with the group of Education Acts. Even though, for the first time, equality of sex was implemented into American law outside of voting, yet it was essentially an afterthought that remains prevalent in gender equality, and particularly gender equality within sport. Presently, there are generations who have grown up with Title IX who can access seeing women and girls playing sports, but athletics itself is still regarded as a masculine entity. The role of masculinity is then presented within the law of Title IX even though it was meant to support

⁴¹ Mcdonagh & Pappano, 33.

women who have not had public access to sport prior to the law. The place of the law pushes a political approach to women in sports that does not apply to men. How this happened signifies the importance of the structure of law in regards to sport.

Title IX is a piece of legislation from The Education Amendments in 1972. It states “no person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance.”⁴² This limited legislation comprised of 37 words was to be enacted in all forms of education (public and private) from Pre-K to University and state funded programs across the United States. The act, along with the several others in the Education Amendments, were all extensions of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 in its original form. Since its first introduction into the American legal system, there have been times in which there were clarifications or details added in, as the document is notorious for not being specific and giving little to no direction to the schools and programs that were tasked with enforcing it. In *Tilting the Playing Field*, author Jessica Gavora refers to Title IX as “an every-mutating federal law” referring to the many skins Title IX has worn.⁴³ Some ways that it has been altered is through debate in Congress. There were worries that the legislation would create quotas in programs invertedly (which it did), but there were heated debates within the chambers of Congress as to whether this was just or not. Representative Maxine Waters was a champion for the quota system threat to remain intact because it gave women equal access that was never given prior to Title IX. She controversially did not mind that men’s teams were at risk of getting cut if it meant women were given their opportunity. Waters was not the only loud voice in the room as Senator Jacob

⁴² “Title IX Of The Education Amendments Of 1972,” Pub. L. No. 92–318 (1972).

⁴³ Jessica Gavora, *Tilting the Playing Field: Schools, Sports, Sex, and Title IX*, 1st ed (San Francisco: Encounter Books, 2002). 2.

Javits and Senator John Tower were advocates of protecting men's sports amidst Title IX's growth. Both proposed amendments named after themselves. The Tower Amendment stated that the equal funding for revenue would no longer exist utilizing federal funding. Revenue can be defined as the income of a substantial amount by a business or commercial entity. Here it is being referenced in terms of popular male sports. The reaction to this proposal was that it was too harsh and would not hold up in court so Tower compromised on the Javits Amendment which included reasonable provision of Title IX on the basis of sports. This law was aimed at protecting significant sports dominated by men that brought in revenue such as football and men's basketball. The Javits Amendment essentially gives popular male-dominated sports the platform to justify greater spending based upon their popularity and the money they make towards the university or league they are within. It was also justified that this revenue income would assist in funding women's sports programs. As shown through this example, Title IX was never meant to change the structure of sport which is extremely organized and bureaucratic, therefore political, it was to force educational institutions to include women legally. Women were supposed to assimilate in the preconceived structure and conform to policies and practices as they have been understood. It can be implied that the legislation was targeted to the straight middle-class white woman. Equality was not destined for the marginalized identities that fit within the identity of woman. As Title IX was going through its initial growing pains, it was difficult to critique because any criticism sparked fear that Title IX would be dropped and the role of women in society would be pushed backwards, even though the law itself was a replication of an already dominant political structure. The ideal vision of what an American athlete looks like was only altered to include women, but not all women. It invites state control

over women's sports, as it does mens, but not in the same way, because men's sport has always existed without intervention of the law. Sport as a whole becomes legitimized by the state by including the other half of the population of people on the basis of individual rights in exchange for state control. This is why most of the criticism of the law comes through court cases, as it questions what has already been legally established, rather than questioning something that is not set in stone from a legal standpoint. However, the law was highly malleable within the court and faces a long history that is still continuing to try to clarify and expand it.

Since its entrance into the political scene, the document has been no stranger to alterations and revisions of how it should be interpreted and then put into direct action as Gavora mentioned. When Title IX was first initiated, there were questions on its constitutionality, as it promoted a separate but equal structure which was deemed unconstitutional from *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) by the pivotal civil rights case, *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954). What is referred to as coercive segregation could be applied to sex, but not to race. Sex, and inevitably gender, becomes a classifying device as is argued as legitimate due to historic discrimination in the eyes of the American justice system, and any cases that defy this explanation seldom reach the Supreme Court as of the 21st century.⁴⁴ The court played a dynamic role in Title IX's infancy, as most alterations come from court cases that contest Title IX's jurisdiction and scope. The big court case here is *Cohen v. Brown University* (1995) which ruled in favor of the plaintiff (Cohen). The plaintiff argued that the demotion of their sports team was unjust on the basis of

⁴⁴ *Hollander v. Connecticut Interscholastic Athletic Conference* is a current court case, as an extension of an older case going through appeals to decide whether or not trans athletes can be granted the right to participate. I would add that I have witnessed this case directly, as I participated in the Connecticut Interscholastic Athletic Conference and have seen both athletes part of this case run. One of which being a trans athlete, who I watched false start at a meet where discourse followed as to whether she truly false started or if was inadvertently removed from the race on the basis of her gender identity.

sex because they repeatedly put in bids to be a varsity sport knowing that their roster would help even out the athletic teams in accordance with Title IX. They utilized the “field of dreams argument” which means if you build it they will come, meaning the university should maintain and create facilities for women’s sports even if there is not interest yet because the establishment of their participation in the athletic institution will encourage more women to play.⁴⁵ Brown University was supposed to provide for all women, not just women who were interested. For example, how would a woman know if she was interested in synchronized swimming if she never had the opportunity to participate in a program for her to act on interest? Brown denied that this would be helpful for increased participation. Brown supplied an illusion of choice, not choice per se, by not giving the women every preference they desired, even when they had the tools to achieve it. They failed to take into account the context that comes with Title IX and women’s relationship in sport historically. Brown failed to comply with Title IX as proven in this case. What is striking about denying the women the right to count their desired sport as varsity, is that it had high levels of participation and interest when 93 spots on women’s teams were unfilled, but Brown still counted these empty spots to confirm their compliance.⁴⁶ Brown not only denied a popular women’s team from becoming varsity, but also counted empty spots as evidence of complying when they quite literally had women with interest and the participation to follow to fill in the gaps. Interest is the most ideal way of complying rather than cutting teams with a sufficient interest as against Title IX. This interpretation altered the meaning of the standing statute of Title IX and granted *Cohen* the win they needed. Title IX then is categorized as a remedial act with the purpose of making up for lost time with women in sports/education.

⁴⁵ Gavora, 73.

⁴⁶ Gavora, 79.

Because of this, there is a catch-22 to female participation: If you build the programs and they don't show the interest then how is it fair for universities to comply if they are set up for failure in that regard? This gave the criticism that *Cohen* was too difficult for schools to uphold.

Women's sports grew faster than expected. The rapid growth was cause for complication in enforcing the statutes. It created gray areas which became colored in through cases like *Cohen v. Brown*. The social construction of sports plays a big role in these cases by not encouraging women to join sports, and women not feeling encouraged to enter sports due to stereotypes. Stereotypes can be defined as substantial proportionality, which comes with residual acts since the tools have not previously been handed to the marginalized subject. One thing that often gets left out in this discussion is, did all women not want to fill programs or was it the white women who didn't? Women of color had and still have less encouragement to participate in sport, and could have been counted as viable personnel on these teams. It should be noted that as a result of *Cohen* not a single Division I women's program has been dropped prior to the 2010s, but there are still more men playing sports overall, especially at the collegiate level, and more white women than any other woman.⁴⁷ In the end, this court case helped create the three tests to measure if a school has complied with Title IX commonly referred to as the three prongs. They existed only loosely, but this case made them direct provisions to adhere to Title IX. Criticism of this case is that it was a battle won, but a war lost because the statute isn't necessarily helpful in maintaining equity across programs because of how unattainable it is. The language of Title IX itself represents equality, rather than equity so the case was in line with interpretation of law,

⁴⁷ The Associated Press, "A New NCAA Report Show the Stark Gap in Funding for Women's Sports," *NPR*, June 24, 2022, sec. Sports, <https://www.npr.org/2022/06/24/1107242271/the-ncaa-says-that-funding-for-women-in-college-sports-is-falling-behind>.

even if it was not the most uplifting result for women. This criticism requires the knowledge of historical backstory as to why this is true.

It is important to note the context of the law. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 was a law that expressed opposition to discrimination which applies to Title IX. The act's purpose was applying to the rights of African-Americans at the height of the Civil Rights movement, but is key in addressing any form of discrimination. The act itself is an example of an important alteration as it put women for virtually the first time since given the right to vote at the forefront of legislation on the basis of sex.⁴⁸ The height of the women's movement in the United States was in 1972. The Equal Rights Amendment (ERA), a central focus to the movement, was passed by Congress earlier in 1972. The ERA's purpose was to eliminate any discrimination on the basis of sex constitutionally. Sex discrimination was a hot topic in the early 1970s due to the rapid growth of the women's movement, inspired by the civil rights movement of the 50s-60s. The government had caught on through years of lobbying and from the power of grassroots organizations primarily built by women and women of color. The role of the women's movement, at the time, was a driving force to all the Education Acts, but especially for Title IX. It was a direct push for institutional change in regards to sex discrimination. Pioneers of this legislation are often liberal feminists who were vital in furthering the women's movement. The importance of emphasizing women as liberal feminists is to associate them with a few key characteristics. Liberal feminist often had the privilege of being white and heterosexual which already had a privileged place within society in comparison to queer women or women of color. Black feminist, for example, undermine white liberalism by pointing out the marginality built within

⁴⁸ Brenda L. Ambrosius, "Title IX: Creating Unequal Equality through Application of the Proportionality Standard in Collegiate Athletics Note," *Valparaiso University Law Review* 46, no. 2 (2012 2011): 557–606. 561.

the state structure. Pointing this out comes with the fear that women will remain oppressed, and that includes white women who have more access to privilege than any other identity that can come with being a woman. Audre Lorde argues that “as white women ignore their built-in privilege of whiteness and define woman in terms of their own experience alone, then women of color become ‘other,’ the outsider whose experience and tradition is too alien to comprehend.”⁴⁹ Most white women during the height of the women’s movement leaned into such privilege under the identity of liberal feminist. Liberal feminism can be accepted because it still fits within the realm of the state, as they contribute to greater exclusion, which perpetuates the sports structure in which it stands, as the white woman demographic is least threatening to the status quo.⁵⁰ In addition to whiteness being more common in sports, it was more common in education therefore the transition to apply to sports was simple because it already matched the population amongst schools. Another key component is the liberal feminist relationship to second wave feminism, which signifies the transition from the private realm into the public realm to begin to experience the rights that men have. The second wave of feminism misses the importance of intersectionality and how that extends to the marginalization of women as a whole. This entire critique ignites the third wave of feminism. A core centerpiece to the shift in ideology comes down to feminist Kimberlé Crenshaw who coined the term intersectionality defining it as “this process of recognizing as social and systemic what was formerly perceived as isolated and individual has also characterized the identity politics of African-Americans, other people of

⁴⁹ Lorde, “Age, Race, Class, and Sex : Women Redefining Difference.”

⁵⁰ Kirsten Hextrum and Simran Sethi, “Title IX at 50: Legitimizing State Domination of Women’s Sport,” *International Review for the Sociology of Sport* 57, no. 5 (August 1, 2022): 655–72, <https://doi.org/10.1177/10126902211037843>. 659.

color, and gay and lesbians, among others.”⁵¹ Groups that had been isolated were now formerly recognized under an umbrella term that assisted in the thinking that invoked the question of identity politics, similar to the ideology of queering. Though this third wave of feminism attempts to remove the invisibility cloak from marginalized groups, it is a lengthy journey to achieve recognition of oppression that is presently ongoing, especially in a sport context.

Institutionalizing women’s sports is an agreement to the rules of the state and requires a separate and unequal tradition, not only by gender, but through race and other marginalized variables. It keeps different identity groups in a separate sphere from white male society, especially as women are gaining status rapidly. Feminists give in to this model by advocating for segregation in sport, which minimizes women, and especially any other marginalized groups within the category of women as “equal and identical programs [are] often not possible nor desirable...” within the institution that currently existed prior to Title IX.⁵² History shows us again and again that institutional change is a slow form of change and always comes with setbacks, and Title IX is no different, especially with its lack of recognition to all aspects of sport and all personnel oppressed by those various aspects. Gavora describes Title IX as “the institutionalization of formal equality.”⁵³ What she alludes to here is that on paper this is an action to conquer sexism internally. It is expected to be enforced in practice due to the tools that the government has provided, but that doesn’t guarantee that it will operate in such a way in practice. Without much formal guidance detailing how programs should execute the transition to an equitable structure, ushering it into practice is extremely difficult and doesn’t speak on behalf of all women.

⁵¹ Kimberlé Crenshaw, “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color,” *Stanford Law Review* 43, no. 6 (1991): 1241–99, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1229039>. 159

⁵² Hextrum and Sethi, “Title IX at 50.” 662.

⁵³ Gavora, 3.

Philosopher Michael Foucault even regards “the real political task in a society...is to criticize the workings of institutions.”⁵⁴ The importance of recognizing sports as an institution is political and also recognizes the properties that maintain it as so. Most programs at this point were made up of men from the top down, so not only was there a demand for female athletes but female coaches and administrators needed to be ushered in. Title IX’s focus was the generation coming up through sports, not the structure that makes up the institution, therefore changes to personnel beyond athletes was limited. The exclusion of the roles that contribute to Title IX’s setbacks as successfully conquering the equity gap in sports has not been achieved.

When the ERA failed to pass in the Senate there was a clear loss towards progress, but Title IX became the new designated issue that was focused upon by women’s organizations and feminists. One success of Title IX is that it defines what fairness is in sports on the basis of sex. Even though Title IX was implemented in educational institutions, it became an unspoken precedence in sports as a whole. After 1979, Title IX was fully put into effect, but through the 80s and into the 90s, was a dark age in politics, especially for the marginalized. For example in *Grove City College v. Bell* (1984), as a private institution wanted to eliminate federal grants, even though they accepted students who were entitled to federal grants for education purposes. Since Title IX is enforced by the utilization of federal grants, federal funding could not be fully eliminated. It was ruled that Title IX’s requirements then would only apply to the programs it benefited and not across all institutions which narrows the scope of what Title IX can offer to the collegiate education system. It may be viewed as this larger overarching act in favor of equality, but through certain courts that lean more conservative the function of what it can offer has been

⁵⁴ Quoted by Cheryl L. Cole, “Resisting the Canon: Feminist Cultural Studies, Sport, and Technologies of the Body.” 71.

limited. This case shows Title IX's emphasis on being equal and not on being equitable. To be equitable would be to add additional resources to put everyone on the same level and take into account the unbalanced distribution of rights up until this point. The *Grove City* precedent was overturned after the emergence of the Civil Rights Act of 1987, which required broad implementation to any institution that utilized federal money had to apply to all elements of Title IX. Despite the court ruling, and then the implementation of the Civil Rights Act of 1987 it was still harder for women to participate equitably. There was still pressure for women to replicate their male counterparts in all aspects including revenue and media in collegiate sports programs. The National Collegiate Athletics Association (NCAA) is also complacent in these issues as they had to remain in line with the law. The NCAA is a third-party organization that collegiate institutions can voluntarily enter to participate in national championships. Today there are 1,098 schools who subscribe to the NCAA with 102 conferences registered.⁵⁵ They also are responsible for monitoring how sport is conducted, as well as supporting around half a million student-athletes.⁵⁶ In the year 2014, the NCAA reported half a billion dollars in generated revenue and created about 12 billion for universities themselves, and this is before the rule change where athletes could capitalize on their success and popularity.⁵⁷ The wishy-washy future of women in sports deterred many girls and women from participating and the ongoing controversies arising in the courts made it difficult for women to find themselves wanting to be athletes, coaches or even administrators. As sports was on the rise for women, it pushed the

⁵⁵ "What Is the NCAA?," NCAA.org, accessed April 27, 2023, <https://www.ncaa.org/sports/2021/2/10/about-resources-media-center-ncaa-101-what-ncaa.aspx>.

⁵⁶ "What Is the NCAA?"

⁵⁷ Athena Yiamouyiannis and Barbara Osborne, "Addressing Gender Inequities in Collegiate Sport: Examining Female Leadership Representation Within NCAA Sport Governance," *SAGE Open* 2, no. 2 (April 1, 2012): 2158244012449340, <https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244012449340>. 2.

polarizations between the sexes and “women’s alienation from sport, their indifference to it, and their reluctance to enter it stem in large measure from the fact that, as it has existed, historically, what sport celebrated, what sport offered, what sport demanded, what sport rewarded do not reflect much of women’s experience of the world.”⁵⁸ The emphasis on male-ness in sports, and the concern of how far Title IX could protect and ensure female equality made women feel excluded in the community they so desperately wanted to be part of. This directly results in women (even today) not wanting to enter sports, as they feel they don’t represent their experiences due to the contrasting elements required to both a female and/or woman athlete.

The 1990s were an era in which Title IX was expanded upon and one explanation why is due to the United States Women’s National Soccer Team. The first thing to take note of is the timing. When the ‘99 Women’s World Cup was played, there were no other international events occurring such as the Olympics or the like. Sports media was at a loss and needed something to cover. It also helped that the tournament was being played in the United States because it reinforces American dominance of sport on a global scale even if the team being represented was made up of women. The coverage extended the bias of the stereotypes that come with being a female athlete. The coverage was quite feminized, and ever since this bias has been ingrained within the media. The feminization showcases through the coverage being focused on the team rather than spotlighting individual players, which is common in covering men’s sports, as more often than not, there is a “hit” player that represents the team in the media and may even have a larger-than-life role when not participating in their sport. A team of women that were bound to themselves appears more authentic and digestible when presenting the feminine sport experience.

⁵⁸ Mary A. Boutilier & Lucinda F. SanGiovanni, “Politics, Public Policy, and Title IX: Some Limitations of Liberal Feminism,” in *Women, Sport, and Culture*, ed. Susan Birrell and Cheryl L. Cole (Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics, 1994), 97–109. 107.

⁵⁹ The meritocracy of each woman was toned down since they were viewed as a team and ultimately were regarded as needing one another in order to succeed without attention to the importance of the individuals that make up a team and the meritocracy that they go through to be a component on such a team. For “this renders their accomplishments and victories as stemming from the uniqueness of the team as a collective—as more than the sum of the parts—rather than from the women athletes per se.”⁶⁰ In order for women to succeed, they need one another, which categorizes the team bond as a feminine entity of sport. It frames the athletes as lacking competition within the team itself due to the feminine coverage. As “the focus on a team ethic rather than a work ethic positions the women outside the parameters of the ordinary white male sporting heroic, grounding motivating action in team and team relationships and (re)producing wider cultural framings of femininity as extrinsically and collectively driven rather than intrinsically competitive.”⁶¹ It also shows that despite the obstacles of inequity, they were capable of succeeding without the equal rights of their male counterparts. This showed they needn’t require further investment as they already have achieved the greatest success they could within their sport. They were not exceptional, just in the right place at the right time housed by the ideals of Title IX. They were women who just happened to love playing soccer, not serious athletes who defined their sport and would have benefited from an increase of resources.

The story was more than sports, it was politics as well. To begin with, it showed that progressive policy was working for the women of the sports world, especially through the actions and success of this team. Politicians, one of which being President Bill Clinton,

⁵⁹ Lindsey J. Meân, “The 99ers: Celebrating the Mythological,” *Journal of Sports Media* 10, no. 2 (2015): 31–43, <https://doi.org/10.1353/jsm.2015.0012>. 35.

⁶⁰ Meân, “The 99ers.” 35.

⁶¹ Meân, “The 99ers: Celebrating the Mythological.” 41.

embraced the team and used them as pawns to showcase Title IX's progression. They also became figureheads for reigniting feminism (specifically a liberal feminist approach that helped get Title IX to law) again in the mainstream. Through the front of sport, a new generation was shown the stability Title IX offers sportswomen. Since they achieved the highest success they could, Title IX takes the credit. Ironically, because Title IX took a lengthy amount of time to truly operate nationally at its fullest capacity. In the 90s, the ideal examples are not even accurate examples of the benefits they claimed to have capitalized upon. Title IX first started being held true in '79, but in reality, it was through to the mid 80s early 90s that the fundamental kinks were being worked out and continue to be smoothed out to this day. When this team won the first women's world cup ever, in 1990, there was not a peep from the media or politicians which shows the lack of development of Title IX. It's viewed as exceptional and "undercuts subsequent success of the U.S. Women's Soccer Team but also renders invisible counternarratives about the many ways professional women's soccer can be argued to have been set up without the necessary support to succeed in the highly competitive sport industry and marketplace since this victory in 1999."⁶² It perpetuates invisible barriers that face women's sports disguised as being feminist due to the legitimacy of political inquiry and of course the media. When Title IX is discussed today, we often, if not exclusively, hear about positives of the law. Famed soccer star on the legendary '99 United States Women's National Team star-turned-commentator, Julie Faudy can often be heard during game-day coverage speaking about the positive impacts of Title IX for her and her teammates' careers, despite Title IX having no direct affect on the team's success. She also has worked with ESPN on documentaries, such as *37 Years* and *Nine for IX* that detail how the

⁶² Meân, "The 99ers: Celebrating the Mythological." 41.

impacts of the law are so powerful for women and girls, now 50 years later (as of 2022), but is it all that perfect?

For one thing, sports remain one of the few things in society that is encouraged and enjoyed by gender segregation. In other educational contexts this would seem wildly wrong, unless voluntary, but in athletics separate but equal is the way to play. What it is about the separation of sexes that creates an equal environment in practice, is “it could be argued that Congress contradicted the very principle of nondiscrimination it was trying to promote when it allowed for separate athletic teams for men and women under Title IX. Moreover, applying a law that outlaws discrimination on the basis of sex to an activity that accepts discrimination on the basis of sex has cast the most difficult issue of ‘gender equity’ in stark relief.”⁶³ Outside our retrospective view of what Title IX did and still does, it may not be as positive of a law then it has been advertised to be. The structure, in terms of sports, further perpetuates discrimination due to sex, which turns into gender roles, and encouraged by the institutions that make up athletics to continue in such a way that as long as women are playing, no other significant change needs to be made because they do, by law, have a seat at the table.

The simplistic language that makes up Title IX is quite vague considering all the elements it is supposed to protect. Once Title IX was indoctrinated, it was clear that it didn’t live up to the expectation what was set of it when President Johnson had first Amended Executive Order 11246, which declared that non-discriminatory practices in hiring and employment extend from the United States government to count sex as a marginalized group, which served as the inspiration for Title IX and The Education Acts. As Title IX continued to be referred to,

⁶³ Gavora, 5-6.

problems arose with the details in which it could protect and faced a similar issue that the Fourteenth Amendment faces, too much riding on too little with no direct clarifications of how to execute the law into practice. The Fourteenth Amendment reads “No State shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States; nor shall any State deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws.”⁶⁴ The law's claim to fame is the ending of slavery and the declaration of citizenship along with equal protection regardless of how citizenship was declared. The Amendment also contributes to the right to privacy in the Due Process Clause. One of the biggest cases filed under the Fourteenth Amendment in the Due Process Clause was *Roe v. Wade* (1973). This case famously gave women the federal right to an abortion and has recently been overturned by *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* (2022) under the Roberts Court. Before *Roe* was overturned, many legal scholars argued that privacy was vague and was the incorrect placement in terms of what it had been designed to protect. One notable scholar was the late Justice Ruth Bader Ginsberg who stated that the court pushed too far in their political reach in *Roe*, and that instead of privacy abortion laws should be based in sex. Sex, nor gender is mentioned in any Amendment of the Constitution outside of the Nineteenth, which granted white women the right to vote as a result of the suffragist movement. This essentially granted at least white women the right to legitimate citizenship with the right to vote. *Roe*, along with the Fourteenth Amendment, implies this absence of sex, as well as gender in the Constitution of the United States, which speaks great volume in regard to how Title IX fits within this story. It is important to note that Title IX is a

⁶⁴ U.S. Const. amend. XIV, § 2.

state product. There is an absence in the, “investment in (re)producing women’s athletic subordination.”⁶⁵ All laws in the United State are built upon the founder's liberal model of power, but those in power have historically been a certain demographic: white, heterosexual, and male, so as the country and the legal system grew, the demographic it was designed for continued to be built within the state. The feminist understanding (this is a universal feminist idea, one of only a few) of the state in which it stands is that it operates through undermining the marginalized, therefore any legal structure indoctrinated into the well-established state system will grow through the exploitation of the “other” and favor the privileged as perceived in the eyes of the state. This shows that Title IX is a victim to the state structure and has assimilated into a system that refuses to acknowledge the marginalized. It works against itself simply through how the state developed. The state’s definition of sex and discrimination is preserved through masculine dominance.⁶⁶ Sports being a hyper-masculine sect of society further perpetuates this doctrine into how it is structured, especially after the emergence of Title IX. Because masculine dominance makes up the institutions that are tasked with enforcing Title IX, having segregated sports by sex helps maintain such power. It always frames women as never being superior in comparison to men, in society, and athletically. Further, to complicate the issue even more is to include women of color, queer people, intersex people, trans, and non-binary people because they are not directly included in Title IX. All of which are factors that Title IX can work against because they have set the agenda for what is classified as a “real” woman and female athlete and what isn’t. Title IX projects legitimacy of the state structure that inherently categorizes anyone but white males as a valued subject contributing to society. As marginalized people gain more rights over time, the

⁶⁵ Hextrum & Sethi, “Title IX at 50: Legitimizing State Domination of Women’s Sport.” 656.

⁶⁶ Hextrum & Sethi, “Title IX at 50:” 661.

male structure in which the state is built upon is threatened and their dominance is contested. There becomes a male-dominated sphere to preserve the dominance. Athletics has become the perfect sect in society to harbor such dominance and Title IX is simply another victim that perpetuates this ideology. For example, women's sports success is regarded as a gift from Title IX while men's sports success is through meritocracy and discipline due to their sexed abilities. The critique of Title IX, is that it failed to include intersectional standards within the law to protect all women. The law most protects white, middle-class and above heterosexual women. The portions left out in the development of the law were not argued for by Congress members fighting for the act, as well as the liberal feminist lobbying for it. If any such mention of women, who are marginalized within the category of women, then it could scrutinize gender priorities. In the end, progress through Title IX, despite the details required for true institutional change were left out, and decades later such discourse still surrounds the law of how to include those who were left out initially. As American poet Maya Angelou says "the truth is, no one of us can be free until everybody is free."⁶⁷ For as much as Title IX has done, it is highly important to be aware of exactly what it hasn't and the complications that have arisen in place of what it is lacking. This includes understanding how much is built off of so little with virtually no expansion since it came to be.

Quotas And Proportionality

A fear that came with Title IX was mandated quotas, which were unconstitutional as a result of *Regents of the University of California v. Bakke* (1978) which centered on quotas in the college-admission process based on race. The case concluded with the elimination of such quotas

⁶⁷ Maya Angelou Quotes. BrainyQuote.com, BrainyMedia Inc, 2023.
https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/maya_angelou_578790, accessed April 26, 2023.

and set a precedent of how quotas can't operate within higher education admission systems. It also is argued that the only way to end quota systems is to prove they exist. Before a quota can be proved as such, it needs to be in practice, which seemingly goes against the scope of the precedent that the *Regents of the University of California* overturned. In Title IX, segregating male and female athletes is encouraged and thought of as the best way to create equal opportunity of participation for men and women. This organizational centerfold to sport as we know it has a regressive effect on all athletes, not just women. For example, when Title IX was first being practiced in schools, many programs had to be created for girls and women. This is often the origin of what some may call "girl sports." By this, I mean sports directly associated with women, or sports where rules have been altered to cut down on contact such as field hockey as a substitute for football. Other forms of "girl sports" would be ones focused on technique and aesthetics such as gymnastics and figure skating. Scores are measured by how certain moves look and complement the athlete, not just the sheer athleticism that is obviously required across all sports, including these feminine sports. Many high school sports that girls were interested in and excelled at were unpopular in overall society such as archery. Most programs were not expanded due to the place these sports have already established in society. Socialization could clearly be manipulated on the basis of gender as in the sport of soccer. In the United States, through socialization, it is often regarded as a feminine sport, which is quite interesting considering it is one of the few sports that has no rule changes on the basis of sex. The dynamic of creating programs became an arms race in terms of not only building programs but building ones in which women were interested in participating in, even if skill lacked. Already sports are being altered in a subordinate way, and equality is not reaching the expectation that it is

supposed to according to the 37 words of Title IX. What enforced these 37 words were the three prongs that universities and schools were expected to follow as a result of *Cohen*. Adherence to the tests to maintain compliance are causation for this starting with the proportionality prong. The prongs stem from various court cases and endless complaints to the Education Department of schools struggling to adhere to Title IX. In 1979, the policy was executed to make it easier to stay in line with Title IX. These three implementations were proportionality, expansion, and accommodation/opportunity. Schools were required to only pass one of these tests to comply. Proportionality was the one that was and is relied upon the most for passing and required “intercollegiate level participation for male and female students are provided in numbers substantially proportionate to their respective enrollment.”⁶⁸ The drawback to this test was depending on the school's population, which was growing more female, male sports were susceptible to being cut quite often because they made up the majority of athletes despite the overall population being more female at universities. The big paradox is that “over the last forty years, Title IX has gone from providing opportunities for men, which is directly contrary to Title IX’s purpose of creating opportunities regardless of sex.”⁶⁹ Title IX sought to eliminate sex discrimination in sports, yet the focus of proportionality puts male sports in jeopardy for the sake of the removal of discrimination, thus not the intention that Title IX offers. Proportionality and the relationship to quotas makes women’s sports untouchable by law and maintains their positionality within sport institutions. If proportionality can be manipulated then the rapid growth of women’s sport is not as pressured to be accommodated to. Instead of quotas, schools of all levels would use the strategy to adhere to Title IX of cutting men’s teams, rather than

⁶⁸ Ambrosius, “Title IX.” 562.

⁶⁹ Ambrosius. “Title IX.” 568.

adding more women's teams. Boys and men were losing out on participation because institutions didn't want to (or couldn't) allocate resources to girls and women's teams. Legally, within Title IX, there is no equal spending rule. Effectively meaning, "by substituting the principle of equal participation for equal spending, Title IX has effectively made quotas the engine that pulls the "gender equity" train; proportionality in the body count drives de facto proportionality in all aspects of athletic programs."⁷⁰ The emphasis on conquering gender discrimination and making an equitable athletics community has been diminished to meet quotas as of the result of implementing Title IX. Compliance rules became the heart and soul of Title IX, rather than the women and the girls that it was supposed to protect and empower. Instead, it created its own paradox: creating equal environments per gendered sports teams, that actually took opportunities from male athletes, along with female athletes. The less opportunity students had to play, the less worry institutions would have in passing compliance rules. To pass this test sports teams must replicate the demographics of the school based on gender. Many universities that provided an abundance of women's teams still were at risk of failing the compliance test. This is because often, male teams had larger teams, and more scholarship athletes. In addition, when schools had a higher population of women, there were still higher percentages of men playing sports based strictly on demographics. Men's teams were vulnerable at institutions with more women overall because the proportionality of athletes had to match the demographics of the school population test. Many male athletes were rightfully upset to lose their teams and/or scholarships just for institutions to not bring in more female teams and athletes per team. On the other end of the spectrum, lots of programs were developed for women, but too few women were recruited or

⁷⁰ Gavora, 54.

were interested, which caused coaches to have to scrape together a team to maintain compliance. They had to turn to walk-ons and even allocate scholarship money to walk-ons which was money taken away from traditionally recruited (predominantly) male athletes. In addition to these small teams with little experience, was the idea that now that women could play, they didn't want to spend the time riding the bench as they had socially for far too long—which is why many women ended their athletic careers right when they began. The political aspect of sports was not compelling to women in the way it was to male athletes. They wanted an opportunity, not a spot to fill a team on the basis of their sex. Title IX's principle foundation is to stop gender discrimination in federally funded institutions and programs, which the proportionality prong does not provide, it only subtracts from the acts' original intentions.

In the court case *Kelley v. The Board of Trustees at University of Illinois* (1993), male athletes claimed they were being discriminated against under Title IX on the basis of sex. A number of male teams were cut while the women's teams remained for fear of not complying with Title IX. The teams in question were too expensive to maintain. If they may have been smaller, they might not have fallen victim to proportionality. They happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. They claimed that this was reverse discrimination by losing their team in favor of the women's team to uphold Title IX. In other words, "the men's teams argued that if Title IX is interpreted to permit the elimination of men's teams solely on the basis of sex, the Equal Protection Clause would be violated."⁷¹ The court concluded that the point of the act was to protect the underrepresented sex, which in this case did not include the men arguing for the violation of Title IX against their teams. The purpose of the act itself was to remedy

⁷¹ Ambrosius. "Title IX." 578.

discrimination, not create it for men. Despite this argument, Title IX has come full circle and fully discriminates on the basis of sex in the interpretation of the compliance by the law at the university level more specifically.⁷² Now men had reduced opportunity in sports to enforce gender equality while it was actively taking it away. In an attempt of “remedying past discrimination [it] has caused other forms of equal protection claims.”⁷³ Trying to remove the quota system enacted an entirely new quota system that affected male athletics for the sake of the inclusion of female athletics. Proportionality being an easy strategy doesn't imply it is equitable for either sex. As long as the athletic population matched the overall schools population, the athletic departments could cut and add as they please. Any forms of reverse discrimination were disregarded claiming “men cannot claim a Title IX violation for lack of cull and effective accommodation if the proportionality requirement is still in their favor.”⁷⁴ The court is aware of the male dominance in sports and how that affects the growth of the institution especially in regards to the inclusion of women. Siding with male discrimination could be seen as turning a blind eye on Title IX and everything it stands for both symbolically and literally. It also points to a separation within male athletics and shows what sports are prioritized as masculine. Most of the sports that were safe were revenue-building sports that put money back into the athletic programs, so the decision to cut teams came down to economic resources. Keeping the revenue-building teams, one, not only maintains the aesthetic of masculinity which legitimizes sport, but two, it ensures that there is a guarantee to make money from the revenue and keep building a commercialized business. The revenue not only grows the male sports that are responsible for the economic game, but it also improves the women's programs that were now popping up in

⁷² Ambrosius. “Title IX.” 583.

⁷³ Ambrosius. “Title IX.” 586.

⁷⁴ Ambrosius. “Title IX.” 577.

accordance to Title IX making the victim the less beloved men's sports above all. Since enacting Title IX the opportunity and competition has accelerated in the women's game, so much so that it is coming full circle and removing opportunities for men to maintain the statute in favor of women who have been historically underrepresented in sports. Thus, "the purpose of Title IX has been discarded in lieu of a quota system that requires universities to provide opportunities to student-athletes, which are determined by gender instead of interest or competitiveness."⁷⁵ Rather than continuing to reach an equitable approach to sport through the education system, the legislation is concaving on itself due to the strict enforcement of quotas that were unintended in the first place. Title IX is now bound with quotas due to how it was formulated, so there will always be some form of quota present, and the way to remove such quota would be to scrap Title IX and start again. The issues with quotas and their close tie to Title IX is that there is a connection to power struggles, not opportunity per se. The residual element of Title IX means that it constantly has to reaffirm its power. With that being said, the compliance rules have offered a great deal of assistance to female athletes to gain opportunity and build a competitive environment to play the sports they love. The proportionality test has assisted in making this dream a reality, but since it is the most common test to pass due to its ease it does not mean it offers the most equitable results for athletes. If anything "as currently applied, Title IX has come full circle and now creates discrimination solely on the basis of sex due to the application of compliance requirements."⁷⁶ This is due to the reliance on the proportionality test, as it creates a quota system predicated upon numbers rather than equity.

⁷⁵ Ambrosius. "Title IX." 584.

⁷⁶ Ambrosius. "Title IX." 583.

In addition to proportionality, there are two other tests universities have the opportunity to pass, but why don't they use them? For starters they are more difficult because they require more resources and attention to detail, which puts institutions at risk of failing them which result in the loss of federal funding, as well as lawsuits, which complicate the path to compliance. It should be noted that despite this fear, federal funding has not once been subtracted from an institution for not complying with Title IX.⁷⁷ They respected a grace period that has lasted half a century. The second test is the accommodation test which ensures that the interests of students are met and they are given the opportunity to participate. The drawback is that it is difficult to upkeep these needs and is highly impossible to keep every athlete happy. The third test is expansion, which seeks to make teams and the department as a whole bigger, but also requires funds, staffing, and participation which does not come overnight. This test is the least popular due to how long the process is to align with compliance. Overall, the prongs were used to assist universities in complying with ease, but at the same time, it pushes programs into a corner because one is cheaper and easier to achieve, but its emphasis is not equality and therefore won't reach equity, which is the whole reason Title IX is to be complied with. Rather than equity, it becomes a statistics game and those who it is meant to serve are left unhappy. Universities hit a wall because proportionality can be easily reached, so once it is reached it is difficult to achieve greater equity because the university has to maintain the proportionality they've accommodated for. Adding a women's team means you have to cut male players, or create a small women's team, or a women's team without interest, which minimizes opportunity for both sexes when the intention is to extend it. This in turn makes a permanent quota system. Although proportionality

⁷⁷ Daniel J. Emam, "Manufacturing Equality: Title IX, Proportionality, & Natural Demand Notes," *Georgetown Law Journal* 105, no. 4 (2017 2016): [i]-1145. 1135.

is quite simple to manipulate and adhere to, it has only been fully achieved in a small number of schools. Title IX can be marked as a civil rights disaster that toes the line of what is truly the natural demand between sexes in athletics, and the concept of proportionality brings these issues to light. The interest of sport is unequal, so the government treats it as so.

Sexual Harassment In Title IX

Another key element of the story is that most of the three prongs became truly enforced only within the 90s, as examined through the National Women's Soccer Team. It was also the biggest extension of Title IX to date referred to as the "unified rule" which moved the jurisdiction of the Department of Education to just an extension within the federal government. Title IX was now in the Office of Civil Rights (OCR). The importance of the movement to the OCR is that they clarify interpretations under the Clinton Administration (as a result of *Cohen v. Brown*). Norma Cantu, who was the Assistant Secretary of the Civil Rights Office played a huge role in Title IX in this era and was essential to extending Title IX beyond gender to include race as well. This is important to note because it helped frame the scope of sexual harassment within Title IX. The pivotal case here is *Franklin v. Gwinnett County Public Schools* (1991). In this case, a student was sexually harassed by a teacher, and when the student, Christine Franklin reported this incident, the administration did nothing. The case was brought all the way to the Supreme Court with a unanimous decision in favor of Franklin that under Title IX, of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, legally, the administration must take accountability for claims of harassment. It confirmed that Title IX applied in adhering to all forms of gender discrimination in terms of education. Therefore, Franklin was granted monetary damages due to the Gwinnett County Public Schools defying the legitimacy of the claims under her rights based upon her sex and the

disadvantage it has legally. The 90s begin by confirming that Title IX extends to sexual harassment in education, in addition to sports and equal access to education. After this case, is the crucial *Davis v. Monroe County Board of Education* (1999). This case is important because it helps define what the scope of sexual harassment is legally. The ruling declared that school boards are responsible to monitor sexual harassment because due to Title IX, equal education is required, therefore sexual harassment is a threat that should be addressed if it is to interfere with schooling. It shows harassment to be caught up within systemic practices by regarding the school board as responsible. It further intertwines Title IX's relationship with institutions, specifically the education institution, outside sport.

Chapter 4: Girls...Meet Boys, Now Split!

Gender Segregation

A main component of understanding women's politicality within sport is looking at how sport is structured. The very core of arranging the organization of sport is sex segregated. A separate but equal structure, but being separate does imply being equal. Gender segregation is still a popular social mechanism in life, but is most noticeably present in the realm of sport throughout the entire institution of education, especially higher education, youth sports, and professional sports. Title IX then represents sport inclusion but on the basis of sex stereotypes which fosters gender segregation as it exists today. When Title IX was enacted, men dominated the student population and athlete population. As time has passed since the law, that has shifted in the opposite direction, meaning more women make up academic populations, especially at the higher levels. The population of men in sports remains the same even with more women in school. This carries over into the administrative ends of athletics programs as well. The practice

of segregation takes place beyond the court and dictates how the bureaucracy of any given program is operated. Coaches, trainers, administrators, managers, referees/umpires, and journalists are roles predominantly taken by men throughout both gendered programs. Women within higher roles of administration are also complacent in the discrimination of women institutionally by continuing to mitigate ideals that do not benefit female athletes. Not only do men dictate the institution of sport across the board, they strictly replicate gendered norms within American society. The structural process of sports not only is made up by men, but made to cater to them as well because “the practice of segregation of men and women in competitive sport is so commonplace that one might assume that it must be legally and morally benign, or perhaps even required as a matter of fairness.”⁷⁸ In all regards, the separation of women is framed as fair, and a necessity of sports to have women participate and carry over into other sects of sports beyond the actual arena itself. Leadership upon the field and in the office is defined as a masculine quality for all levels of leadership from the highest to the lowest job roles. For example, even the waterboy is gendered as masculine despite the small role they play in the grand scheme of sports. In terms of networking in the sport field, men have a greater advantage because they are one, more likely to be associated as an athlete, and two, the sport field is built with them in mind. They are perceived as having more value within bureaucratic society, than their female counterparts. The path of upward mobility is more clear for men. For women to be recognized, they must be exceptional at what they do, while most men in the field are lucky to be part of a gendered form of networking. The concept of men trusting other men is at the core of sports administration and bureaucratic society directly. Even administrations of women’s sport

⁷⁸ Patrick S. Shin, “Sex and Gender Segregation in Competitive Sport: Internal and External Normative Perspectives Sex in Sport,” *Law and Contemporary Problems* 80, no. 4 (2017): 47–62. 48.

are still heavily dominated by men. Teams such as Angel City Football Club of the National Women's Soccer League (NWSL) is the first all women-owned club in sports history and they were established in June of 2021. The prominent female owners are of celebrity status so they have the time and money to overcome gender in the ways most women in the sports field do not. This points to the importance of class within the field overall and in women's sports specifically. It always comes back to Title IX being accessible to a white middle class and above demographic within sports. Even when women are actively trying to overcome masculinity, they still in turn end up repeating it in some regard simply for being within the system itself. The same principle can be said of athletes of color or queer athletes. Women are typically viewed as lesser in sport in all aspects. Within the category of women, there are other identities who may be discriminated against on the basis of their womanhood in addition to the other marginalized identity. Sex segregation not only separates on the basis of sex and gender, it also separates on behalf of race and sexual identity. Such segregation exists in a legitimate way because "Title IX's permission to sex-segregate contact sports effectively led to universal sex segregation in virtually all sports"⁷⁹ Sports can get away with such segregation because Title IX has normalized segregation on the basis of sex so even within a marginalized group in sport there is further marginalization within that's unavoidable to the state of the system itself. Since Title IX is an entity of the American legal system, it is wrapped in political ideology that justified segregation, therefore indoctrinating it into women's political identity within sport.

Once again, the institution of college itself has become primarily feminine but sports have stayed masculine. This may be because sports are defined as masculine in all aspects, and

⁷⁹ McDonagh & Pappano, 221.

gender segregation has a lot of responsibility in this. This includes all aspects of socialization such as stereotypes, physicality, and the symbolism that comes with it, along with the general understanding and assumption that men are dominant over women across all areas within the sports community. For example:

“Gender roles and stereotyping clearly undermines the perception of female competence and power whilst highlighting men’s higher power and social status. Such stereotyping not only represents the way in which men and women actually display their gender, but informs a hegemonic expectation of gender traits. It has been suggested that this power creates disjuncture between equity policies and the way in which gender relations are expressed within organizations.”⁸⁰

This excerpt speaks to how common this misogyny sits within the institution of sport and how this segregated relationship between men and women in sports becomes ingrained into the bureaucracy and beyond. This can include the label of mens/womens sports. When women’s sports are discussed, there is an emphasis on adding the woman because men’s sports are simply called by their sport with no indication of their gender. The lack of gender as a prefix is actually quite telling as to who will be on the pitch. In the media, the images we see promoting sports, and discussing sports are “ubiquitous[ly] images of men.”⁸¹ Sports being a shadow of masculinity is inescapable, which speaks to how segregation is a large factor in maintaining that masculinity. The main arguments on sports segregation by legislators, (and feminists) that advocated and continue to advocate for Title IX, is that it gives women the opportunity to excel in their own right without the competition of men. On the other hand, those who oppose Title IX argue that segregation constitutes discrimination, as it holds people back on the basis of sex which is based upon nature, which is a socially constructed assumption from biology. The

⁸⁰ Lauren J. Joseph and Eric Anderson, “The Influence of Gender Segregation and Teamsport Experience on Occupational Discrimination in Sport-Based Employment,” *Journal of Gender Studies* 25, no. 5 (September 2, 2016): 586–98, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09589236.2015.1070712>. 558.

⁸¹ Emam, “Manufacturing Equality.” 1134.

separation is to protect women from male-dominating strength, and not to minimize it or threaten its dominance. In other words, “the rationale for segregation is not simply that separation is in the best interest of women, but that separation is necessary for women to have equal opportunities in sport because of their physiological difference from men.”⁸² This argument is the soul foundation as to how gender segregation exists within sport, but alas it is more complex than what the surface beholds. The physicality argument perpetuates the elevation of men over women. When men excel more than women, it legitimizes the structure of segregation as it exists. Starting from the youth level, the structure of sports is based upon concepts of meritocracy. Both men and women are capable of meritocratic principles, but men more often are associated with and receive more credit for doing so. Stark gender roles then become further perpetuated through the activity of sport without children being aware of it, and by the time they may be aware of it it’s ingrained into their understanding of what sport is and what it can offer in building character. The segregated system in which it stands is entangled so deeply into traditional social conceptions of sex and gender within society beyond sport. It thrives upon the belief that “all women are assumed to be athletically inferior to all men, whether the comparison is between or within an ascriptive group”⁸³ Sport has a hyperfixation on the roles in which men and women are meant to play in society that are ingrained and conducted at all levels. One way in which segregation continues to exist in such extreme ways, is the alteration of sport rules when women have been granted the ability to play. For example, women’s lacrosse is almost an entirely different game than men’s lacrosse. The women’s game is a mild contact sport with minimal gear, while men’s lacrosse is based on contact and requires layers of gear to step onto

⁸² Shin, “Sex and Gender Segregation in Competitive Sport.” 54.

⁸³ McDonagh and Pappano, 5.

the field and participate. Women's sports almost always are altered from men's sports, and it never occurs the other way around. There are also variations of what it looks like as well. There are sports such as football that women do not play, and there is no version of it in the mainstream. The second is the same sport with different rules like lacrosse. One last way sports can be segregated is catering to gender roles as they do in couples figure skating. Men are expected to perform certain moves certain ways as do the women, and that impacts the score of their skate.⁸⁴ Alterations are also done in unspoken ways along with formal rule changes. Take dunking in basketball for example: It is not a rule, or a requirement to winning a game, but it has an awe factor. It is often framed that women are weaker by nature because they can't dunk, but why should that matter if it is not a requirement of the game. The image of the dunk is then, masculine and ascribed to a character flaw of women's basketball. It becomes a gender role that is ingrained within sport despite it having no formal connection to the sport itself. Feminists, who are against Title IX and how it operates currently prefer to believe in gender blindness which implies that there is no physical or mental difference between the sexes which is false and diminishes the foundational component of sport, which is competition. (Difference by definition is not a bad thing per se, and that doesn't mean that men and women can't exist together in sports; it just requires a monumental shift in how we as a society view sports, but also compromises the bureaucracy and institution of it. Difference from a feminist standpoint ensures inequality for women because it highlights their "weakness" as compared to men. As women in sports have become more normalized, differences have become normal as well and not as shocking or unbelievable.) Sex segregation is often compared to how the Special Olympics

⁸⁴ McDonagh and Pappano, 11-14.

operate. Women are treated like being female is a disability and must be separated out from men, who are the pinnacle of ability. All women that are aspiring in sports and beyond want to be autonomous, and sex segregation as a concept can deny them of that very simple right.⁸⁵

Separating women through that lens means women are bound to play with themselves in fairness to them. Not only is this argument incorrect to women's abilities, it also diminishes the exceptionality of disabled athletes, who throughout all odds conquer athletics despite a disability that may have blocked them from doing so. Treating women as if they are Special Olympic athletes puts down both groups immensely and elevates men by categorizing them as the only able group. It's a flawed assumption based on sex and not ability, and above all a political implication of women in sport.

In addition to stark differences of rules there are some variations of sport that have quite literally been invented to keep women out of traditionally male sports. The biggest example of this is the development of softball. Baseball has been given the iconic tag-line of America's pastime and is considered a contact sport, while softball is not. Prior to Title IX, women commonly participated in baseball, especially at the youth level. Take Virnie "Jackie" Mitchell, who excelled in baseball. On one occasion, she pitched at a Yankee Exhibition match where she struck out both Babe Ruth and Lou Gehrig. Immediately following that, she was pulled from the game, and what came next was the argument that baseball was too strenuous for women. From there, women were banished from the sport of baseball despite having the ability to succeed against some of the greatest men in the league at the time as Mitchell shows. Title IX permits sex segregation in contact sports, the reason for it is due to the fear of injury. This belief was

⁸⁵ De Beauvoir, "Introduction." 253.

established after Mitchell's historic success did that become the reason women were not allowed to play baseball, (which speaks to the question of if that is a fair reason for exclusion). In the exclusion of contact sports through Title IX, there is discrepancy with the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. Playing with the boys in a gendered contact sport is actually legal. According to Title IX, if there is no equivalent women's team then they have the right to try out for the men's sport, as a result of the Equal Protection Clause. It is a right that women can't be denied even if it is unpopular. This is not as common of an occurrence as it used to be because of the gendered development of sport, so women have a place to play. Football has become the new ground that women attempt to cover when defying gender segregation. As examples within football have become more common as of late, baseball plays less of a prominent role in how segregation may not be as just as it seems. After Mitchell's all-star strikeout women are forced out of the sport all together. This leads to categorizing baseball as a contact sport as a way to push women out and keep them out, but on the other hand, as softball becomes more developed it's deemed a non-contact sport. The variation in rules of softball compared to baseball gender the sport without regarding skill and athletic ability. There is a common trope amongst sports where women are succeeding and then becoming outlawed in the sport where they excel. Another example that goes hand in hand with Mitchell's story is swimmer Sybil Bauer.⁸⁶ She was such an exceptional swimmer that she is often credited with why swimming in the Olympics is segregated. Her athleticism was a force to be reckoned with and the International Olympic Committee reckoned. She was so good there was fear she would show up men at the highest level of swimming, even more than she already had in her career.

⁸⁶ Bauer was also 19-22 years old when she was outpacing men in her sport before dying suddenly at 23 at what was reported as a cold, which speaks to the gendered biases within the medical field.

Women throughout their history in sport have asserted their athletic dominance, but it has only suppressed their abilities rather than recognizing them for their talents.

A highly important aspect of joining and watching sport is the competition. The idea that the best of the best come together for the greatest game all season is fundamental to sport, especially in regard to college athletics and professionals. This points to another element of segregation within sport, not on the basis of sex, but athletic ability. Many athletes are genetically preceived to exceed. Michael Phelps, the most decorated gold-medalist swimmer happens to be double-jointed in his elbows, knees, and ankles which helps pronounce the strength and speed of his strokes. The NBA's current population height average is 6'6, which is 8 inches taller than the average man.⁸⁷ Sports operate on behalf of effort and physicality, so from youth to pro, those who don't have that end up dropping out earlier making the competition stiffer. Utilizing the average height of an NBA player, most average men physically cannot compete with the average NBA player based on anatomy only. Throughout various sports various body types excel (not exclusively, but often) which help the athlete in achieving their success. The segregation within sport is key for fair and engrossing competition. Diverse skills and body types across sport help ensure the success of athletes. A football linemen is not expected to be able to do a balance beam routine and vice versa. Sport enforces male power along with the formation of sex segregation in society. In accordance with the Fourteenth Amendment and the Equal Protection Clause, athletes are considered individuals but sports immediately sort them on the basis of sex and exploit gender roles assigned to the corresponding sex. Title IX diverges from the Fourteenth Amendment by categorizing on the group basis of sex

⁸⁷ "What Is The Average Height Of NBA Players in 2023?," LINES, accessed April 25, 2023, <https://www.lines.com/guides/average-height-nba-players/1519>.

rather than individual actors. In some ways Title IX does not align with the Fourteenth Amendment due to its lack of emphasis on the individual. The purpose of Title IX with the adherence to gender segregation was to build a separate but equal model, but through American history and civil rights that doctrine is a paradox when it comes to applying to the marginalized group. The marginalized group is always disadvantaged in the absence of privilege that the dominant group has always had access to. They become marginalized not only as select groups, but also as individuals inadvertently. The marginalized group, and other marginalized individuals within such groups are always pushing to catch up which is why equality does not serve women in sports without methods of creating equity. Being separate in sport diminishes any chance of equity through Title IX's sheer execution. In *Playing With the Boys* authors Eileen McDonagh & Laura Pappano claim sport to be a "pumped-up, artificial rendition of men's strength and women's weakness as a definition of sex identity."⁸⁸ They claim that the very existence of a sport structure is designed to replicate the ideals of a patriarchal social structure that champions sport as a path to dominance. Policies that reinforce the structure of sport codify gender roles from society onto sport. It legitimizes the gender roles that said policies may be trying to overcome. It should be emphasized that Title IX's language and focus is based on sex, not on gender. We segregate by gender without even confirming the level of ability, which is a key component of maintaining high levels of athletics. In other words "sex-segregated policies construct sex-difference."⁸⁹ Society has constructed clear differences in sex, which is then replicated across institutions and deems segregation as the cure to such difference, but that difference contributes to further perpetuating segregated gender values. Therefore, it is a mirror of gender within

⁸⁸ McDonagh and Pappano, 3.

⁸⁹ McDonagh and Pappano, 15.

society through the sport community, and the focal point of it as well. It becomes viewed as inherent rather than constructed, as Judith Butler frames about the sex/gender system. This is what justifies sex segregation as natural and rational, even if sex segregation has positive value to sports. Society's gender stereotypes also contribute to segregation. The association with masculine and feminine keeps women going to “feminine sports” and men to “masculine” ones. Stereotypes play a larger role in how sports are performed. Programs where sports are geared more to women may have more resources and more interest, the same can be said of men. Being a trailblazer requires not only crossing the line of stereotypes but also overcoming the difficulties of lacking the utilization of specific structures designed with gender in mind (or not in mind). Either way, sport reproduces gendered stereotypes in their segregated existence. The state (which includes Title IX) presents itself as neutral vessels of progress in which it's not. There is in fact a set agenda to maintain the role of gender by utilizing stereotypes.

The case to justify gender segregation comes down to women's voluntary choice to segregate. Historically Women's Colleges or attending a Historically Black College/University (HBCU) is a marginalized persons choice to exit a system that discriminates against them and enter one to experience an environment away from a society that does not support them. The same can be said for sports. Voluntarily choosing to separate encourages a safe environment to express interest and reinvent what sport can be. Recently, the first ever trans men vs. cisgender men's game occurred in the United Kingdom. TRUNK FC, made up of trans men far and wide around the UK came in and joined to play.⁹⁰ The level of players differed mostly down to the age in which they transitioned. Many stopped playing due to being excluded from joining their

⁹⁰ Dawn Ennis, “A First for UK Football: Trans Men vs. Cisgender Men,” *Los Angeles Blade: LGBTQ News, Rights, Politics, Entertainment* (blog), April 2, 2023, <https://www.losangelesblade.com/2023/04/02/a-first-for-uk-football-trans-men-vs-cisgender-men/>.

preferred gender identity's team. Despite the mix of levels and that it was an amateur league meeting, it was a historic day because these trans men set a precedent that trans people can and should be visible in sports. They voluntarily created a team for trans men to enter a sporting arena together, rather than having each individual singled out on a cisgendered men's team. The choice to play together and to show that they can participate can inspire the trans youth that they can in fact be present in sport and hopefully overtime won't have to be in their own separate league or team (unless they choose to). It may be socially convenient to separate sport, but that does not make it a good excuse as to why. The cycle of gender segregation in sports perpetuates the issues at large within sport, not just for women but every person touched by sports within American society. As long as there are clear differences between genders within sports the more the sexed differences will be paid attention to. Thus, as long as male athletes are required to do more, they will be regarded for doing it despite not even giving women and other marginalized athletes the opportunity to in the first place. Gender roles make sex look arbitrary and if gender is socially constructed then ex/gender in sport should not define what "woman" can be.

Chapter 5: Boys Rule, Girls Drool

Masculinity

Sport is categorized as inherently masculine. This may explain why many women are uninterested in playing sports as negative evaluations of women's capacities are implicit in the "masculine hegemony in which sports are embedded."⁹¹ They feel they don't have a place in athletics and if they find that it's in their interest and abilities, they must adhere to the masculine hegemony that is required to participate in sport. For a man to be masculine, in sport, is not

⁹¹ Lois Bryson, "Sport and the Maintenance of Masculine Hegemony," in *Women, Sport, and Culture*, ed. Susan Birrell and Cheryl L. Cole (Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics, 1994), 47–64. 48.

political and is central to the foundation of their identity. In opposition, women are not masculine, but are political. Masculinity is defined by separating its actions from femininity.⁹² In terms of women's politicality within sport, the fact that they are present (or absent) in a masculine domain is an indication of their politicized relationship. Sports acts as a male preserve in public society. Women compete with men in daily life just about everywhere outside of sports and greatly succeed at it, while sport takes on an entirely new discourse. Sport becomes a place of gender distinction. Women have more rights which means there must be a place in which they don't have access to that. In sports basic structure it "...crucially privileges males and inferiorizes women."⁹³ The significance of masculinity is baked into the production of sport. The hierarchy within sport operates in an active way by not just telling certain sports are more important, but showing it too. It's not being said explicitly that sports like football are more important than let's say, softball, it's being shown as so due to football's value in society in comparison to softball. This is seen throughout the media, in the institution of each sport itself, and through every other fathomable way. All factors contribute to the common female disdain of sport.

There is a clear split between sports within the community. For example, contact sports are emphasized to be masculine and feminine sports are regarded as not "real sports" due to their lack of contact. Since contact sports are considered dangerous for women it would be presumed that they too would be dangerous for men. Through that lens, masculine contact sports are twice as dangerous. Returning to the example of lacrosse, the rules are different therefore the level of contact is different. Even when the rules stay exactly the same, there are still elements of unequalness present. Take soccer for example: The Women's National Team in the United States

⁹² Hextrum and Sethi, "Title IX at 50."661.

⁹³ Bryson, "Sport and the Maintenance of Masculine Hegemony.," 48.

has only within the recent months been granted equal pay akin to the men's team despite having a better record than the men from the beginning of the program. In terms of the World Cup, the prize money is different in terms of gender. For the Women's World Cup this summer, the prize money has been increased, but it is not the same amount given to the male winners. Issues like this lie within the masculine institution and the places where the women fare worse are the ones deeply connected to institutions such as World Championships or the Olympics. A domestic equivalent would be the National Football League.⁹⁴ It is the pinnacle vision of masculinity in sports. One way they do this is by perpetuating male sports (like football) and the relationship to violence. Masculine sports often have innuendos that put women down and promote violence, rape, and sexual assault. In that regard, "through the medium of sport, women are maintained in their subordinate position."⁹⁵ The images of men dominating through how aggressive and strong they can be promotes their dominance and promotes female gendered stereotypes as a result. Combat sports like wrestling, football, and others seek to exclude women on the basis of anatomy, and to maintain "macho value" as an attribute of masculinity.⁹⁶ A staple to the macho culture is aggression, which is present in the various combat sports. An argument to men having more aggression is often tied to the sex hormone testosterone, but it is only when the hormone is doubled or tripled does a greater amount of aggression occur.⁹⁷ Aggression has become gendered despite it not being directly tied with the male sex in the way sport leads it to be believed.

⁹⁴ Thursday Night Football, which is not the primary football day of the week, was worth 105 billion dollars when the NFL sold the coverage to Amazon. The billion with a B speaks to the dominance it has in American society.

⁹⁵ Byrson, 61.

⁹⁶ Eric Dunning, "Sports as a Male Preserve: Notes on the Social Sources of Masculine Identity and Its Transformations," in *Women, Sport, and Culture*, ed. Susan Birrell and Cheryl L. Cole (Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics, 1994), 163–79. 165.

⁹⁷ Patrice A. Oppliger, *Wrestling and Hypermasculinity* (Jefferson, N.C: McFarland, 2004). 53.

Testosterone is actually present in both males and females. Testosterone in men is more thoroughly researched, but the hormone is present in women throughout their ovular cycle. It's present in the womb for both sexes, and there are some females who have more testosterone in utero development which can alter their interests and athletic ability. This does not imply that the person would be intersex, they may just hold more testosterone than other females. This is referred to as Congenital Adrenal Hyperplasia (CAH). Hormones are a sliding scale and the amount present in each person is not equal. Differences between men and women as sexed beings are not as far off as what meets the eye. For example, the average male is around 28 pounds and 5.4 inches more than the average female.⁹⁸ Size and hormones are the biggest separations between male and female, and even at that, it is a lot more diverse across general people. Men's size advantage is the biggest advantage they have over women biologically. Athletes as a demographic, especially at the higher levels may replicate a certain body type (especially male athletes), but in terms of what is proven to be the greatest difference between the sexes, there is not all that much. The average athletic woman is also most likely going to be more athletic than an average level athletic male due to anatomy. Take hurdler Gail Devers in a competition: Her hurdle time was only beaten by 3 out of 25 men in the competition, excluding the top men's heat.⁹⁹ In this example, Devers' athletic talent showcases that women can compete with men's ability and even surpass it. She may not be faster than the fastest men, but she was faster than the majority of the male pool. According to a study measuring various exercises between men and women, it was proven that, "males have the potential to be, pound for pound, stronger than females. On average females possess 40-60 percent of the average male's

⁹⁸ McDonagh and Pappano, 52.

⁹⁹ McDonagh and Pappano, 72.

upper-body strength and 70-75 percent of the average male's lower-body strength. These estimates, however, vary between trained and untrained athletes."¹⁰⁰ The key word here is "potential." Males have more muscle mass than females, but that does not signify that they are necessarily stronger. In fact, women more commonly have stronger lower body muscles and more stamina to maintain against fatigue. Within females as a sex, there is greater variability in their bodies in comparison to men. They also have more body fat, have longer-lasting metabolism and fuel muscles differently. In favor of masculine dominance, there is not a lot of research in physiology as to why that is. This puts women at a disadvantage "because physiology can be influenced by social factors, researchers are still trying to understand what constitutes a biological factor and what is the result of social experience."¹⁰¹ Even the biggest argument of male dominance, which is biology, is not even fully researched, so the concept of difference is not enough to argue that women are lesser than men. The research has been heavily biased throughout history. "Thus, the very notion of dividing athletics coercively—and 'solely' on the basis of sex on the grounds that women are inherently physically inferior to men— ignores that some female group differences advantage women athletes. It also ignores how individual motivation, training, and distinct personal characteristics play into the outcome of an athletic contest."¹⁰² The nature argument (which is the stabilizer for gender segregation) is simply not enough to go on knowing that the history that backs it up is actually lacking. Biology does not exist independent of other factors, especially social factors. Social practice is often mistaken for

¹⁰⁰ McDonagh and Pappano, 76.

¹⁰¹ McDonagh and Pappano, 64.

¹⁰² McDonagh and Pappano, 75.

biological factors and they are not the same. As discussed earlier, sex is not pure, and the concept of being pure in sex is social.

The hypermasculine figure is idealized in mainstream U.S. culture. Sports from the youth age group are presented as ways to polarize the sexes with combat aggression sport, which means that it associated with bullying or other ways in which masculinity and strength can be excluded which includes sexual assault. Aggression not only applies to the physical, but attitudinally as well. At the college level, male sports teams are associated with more sexism and homophobia.¹⁰³ A study done by the NCAA found that athletes made up 3.3 percent of the student population but were responsible for 19 percent of sexual assault cases on average.¹⁰⁴ In this case, aggression, violence, and sexual force against women is promoted in sport in many ways. One example is how these ideas are ingrained into the practice of sport, and another is through the media. Within the broadcast of hypermasculine, macho sports, there are many ways in which boys and girls become aware of their assigned gender roles. Wrestling is a sport that is extremely violent as a central part of the sport, especially with storylines at the professional level. The aesthetic of wrestling thrives on hypermasculinity and the constant repetition of showing all of the ways in which it is revered. These acts are exploiting women, people of color, and queer people because in this realm, it is not what is ideal. Strong, aggressive, tough, and masculine are the ideal and anything that isn't that, is against the status quo.

Women as a category are looked down upon by entering the space that men occupy and dominate. Despite their presence, there still seems to be a gap between women and men in sports on the basis of sex and gender roles, such as gender stereotypes. Exclusion and denigration are

¹⁰³ Oppliger, 62.

¹⁰⁴ Oppliger, 82.

alive and well against women in the sphere of sport when all they are attempting to do is forge their own path, despite having more hoops to jump through simply to be present. When women play sports, they are often tasked with the choice of being feminine or athletic. Both identities are seen as within the same vacuum, separately rather than a combined identity that can exist.

Women are searching for their legitimacy in sports as athletes that happen to be women, not in comparison to men or as sex objects. The reason as to why this identity is so hard to build is because sports have been constructed for male potential and ability, not for the female ability.

The concept of the natural is the biggest barrier women face in the masculine practice. Michael A. Messner says that they are “limited to their own sex” meaning as hard as women try they can never truly break the glass ceiling because the discrimination always comes back to sex.¹⁰⁵ The presence of women would complicate an already established system “by creating female-free spaces in which to learn to be men, American men are also free to create and perpetuate myths about those missing females.”¹⁰⁶ This belief is responsible for why gender segregation is so prevalent in the world of sports. Men wanted to continue to be separated from the feminine which includes queerness. The sanctity of the masculine rituals particular to contact sports, are viewed as traditional and if women, or even queer men were present, it would take away from these particular rituals and norms. If sport can be laid out in an institutional manor to favor boys, then it is deemed legitimate from youth sports, which can be carried into the college and professional sphere, as “organized sports provide opportunities for men to segregate boys from girls, and to indoctrinate them into their roles as members of the dominant class.”¹⁰⁷ Sport being

¹⁰⁵ Michael A. Messner, “Sports and Male Domination: The Female Athlete as Contested Ideological Terrain,” in *Women, Sport, and Culture*, ed. Susan Birrell and Cheryl L. Cole (Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics, 1994), 65–80.

¹⁰⁶ Mariah Burton Nelson, 107.

¹⁰⁷ Mariah Burton Nelson, 107.

an institution with a very specific structure helps certain demographics become elevated within the system and others demoted, especially as careers accelerate. Since Title IX has applied to sport, “whenever dominant groups segregate themselves from the mainstream, their gatherings solidify their sense of superiority, and their denigration of the underclasses.”¹⁰⁸ For the powerful to remain in power, hierarchical rules and institutional organization is required. If sport can remain masculine and produce the constructed gender role of masculinity, then all it has to do is block pathways from anyone who does not execute that to participate or participate to the same degree. The masculine power is not just implemented through separation, but through the personnel perpetuating it such as coaches.

Coaching And Masculinity

Coaching is predominantly a masculine profession. Since sport has been catered to only one sex for so long, when Title IX was being implemented, it was often difficult to find coaches who were women. As the number of athletes grew, the number of female coaches did not grow at the same rate because the girls of Title IX were the first legitimate generation of female athletes according to the law. Fewer women as role models to girls and young women meant more reliance on male coaches within the feminine side of sport. With less coaching and sport options, women often find themselves ending their career in sport sooner than men do. They are forced to accept the system that was not built with them in mind rather than reshaping the system to cater to their legitimate path to participation and leadership. When women were learning to be coaches, they were taught to be coaches for men, often by men, as that is the only coaching structure that was in place. Since women are so uncommon in coaching, they become tokenized

¹⁰⁸ Mariah Burton Nelson, 123.

and it's assumed that the presence of female coaches is enough to benefit female athletes. There were no considerations that women athletes may have different needs compared to men. Within the profession of coaching, sexism is built within, especially when men have power over girls and young women. Women are more likely to be sexually abused in sports, especially by a figure of authority.¹⁰⁹ Power is a key part of the coach/athlete dynamic, so when gender is placed on top of that power structure, it's going to affect women differently, especially if a male coach has not previously interacted with women athletes. What's worse is the trend of male coaches who have gone from club to club or from school to school because of their inappropriate decision to cross lines in the coach/athlete relationship. Despite this trend, such coaches are not prevented from continuing to take positions at more women's programs. This is another barrier that female athletes face that male athletes may not face as much or as consistently, but that is not to say it doesn't exist at all because it does. Yet, the legacy of Title IX allows women to play, but that doesn't guarantee the environment in which they are given is a safe one in terms of the power dynamic within the masculine structure, and specifically with the masculinity rooted in the role of male coaches. In Mariah Burton Nelson's book, *The Stronger Women Get the More Men Love Football*, she dedicates an entire chapter to the male coach/female athlete relationship. Her overarching conclusion is "male dominance in women's sports reinforces the notion that men have the ultimate authority to teach sports..." even in situations where they may not be qualified.¹¹⁰ Often men find themselves coaching the women's sides because they are not qualified enough for the prestige of the men's side. This reflects not only their ability to coach, but also the idea that men's sports are more important and male athletes deserve better quality coaches. Once

¹⁰⁹ Hextrum and Sethi, "Title IX at 50." 663.

¹¹⁰ Mariah Burton Nelson, 169.

again, it places a political identity upon women by existing within sport, and not much else. Male coaches who coach women and don't abuse their power do exist, but it is ultimately overshadowed by the coaches that abuse their power by utilizing their gender and role as an authority figure.

Assault In The Athletic Realm And The Male Fear Of Being A Woman

Male coaches having inappropriate relationships with their athletes is a common trope in women's sports and at times, even leads to marriage. When coaches marry an athlete or former athlete, the reliance on the institution of marriage is used as a legitimizing factor to condone the abuse, as not abuse. Because of this complicated relationship with male coaches and female athletes, many athletes who get abused don't report sexual misconduct and assault in fear of retaliation and the loss of their sport career. As women's sports has accelerated, more attention has been devoted to reporting and earning justice from abusive coaches and other roles where men have authority over female athletes. One story on sexual assault that was covered extensively by the media was within the USA Gymnastics program accusing team doctor Larry Nassar of sexual assault of over 265 women.¹¹¹ One hundred and sixty five of those women confronted him in court.¹¹² He was accused of touching girls and giving them unnecessary vaginal exams. The ages of the victims ranged from 9 to young women, and adults, including several Olympic athletes. The Nassar trial was a breakthrough in this regard as he was convicted of his crimes and sentenced to 60 years in prison, and the event caused the entire USA Gymnastics board to step down.¹¹³ Not only do men hold the most power throughout most

¹¹¹ "Larry Nassar Case: USA Gymnastics Doctor 'Abused 265 Girls,'" *BBC News*, January 31, 2018, sec. US & Canada, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-42894833>.

¹¹² "Larry Nassar Case."

¹¹³ "Larry Nassar Case."

athletic institutions, they sometimes are abusers, or are complicit to such abuse. This event speaks to another element in women's sports that is perpetuated by men, which is the sexualization of female athletes. In terms of male authority figures, there is an element of eroticized domination, meaning power being held through a sexual manner. It is not enough to coach women to feel power, but it must be taken to the next level by sexualizing their athletes and even fostering inappropriate relationships where sexual assault and rape can occur.

In addition to coaches as perpetrators of various types of assault, male athletes also are linked with a higher number of assaults reported in college campuses than any other group of men. Beyond coaches, the sexualization of women is rampant across the sports community, along with the implication of women's body politics as a result. When it comes to male athletes, they are socialized within a sports sphere throughout their lives and by the time they reach college, have achieved an adequate amount of success which granted them to play at the collegiate level. Since this success has high leverage within our society, there is a level of confidence that men are able to carry on the basis of their athletic performance that allows them the privilege to get away with more, especially if they are key parts of a revenue-building team. This applies to other parts of their lives, such as their relationships with those that are less privileged, especially with women. The hegemonic culture of sport can teach men to be unaware of invasive behavior towards women in a sexual manner. This epidemic is not uncommon in the sports world because it is often a taught behavior from youth sports, even down to how coaches are taught to coach replicate this epidemic. From young ages, men are taught that being a "girl" is the worst thing you can be in sport, which builds women to be weaker. When women are seen as weaker athletically, men grow up and tie that belief to women across society, as it is a taught

gender role to men (and to women). This is a sexed belief and to sex is to be political inadvertently. To go a step further, another common insult used by men is “suck my dick.” What’s telling about this insult is if one man is saying it to another, he views the person he is insulting as less masculine. He is viewing him as a woman in the sense that he is tasked with the woman’s role of pleasuring the man. This is another layer of eroticized dominance that is placed upon women. In this example, it is placed on a man by another man. The relationship between sex and power is particularly central to sport and male competition in that regard. The more aggressive nature of the sex, mimicking say a combat sport, the more masculine you are entitled to be, especially to other men, therefore women. This legitimizes aggression in sex, which to many women is considered assault. Through this lens, it shows men as entitled to rape. Of course, not all men who play sports are rapists, and men in heavily masculine communities within sport are aware of such wrongs, but the issue is that events like this are common in the realm of male athletics. In addition, men that act as bystanders to their behavior despite knowing it's wrong are also part of perpetuating the problem. A common observation is that men who participate in co-ed sports or practice with their female counterparts are less likely to participate in this fraternizing lifestyle. They have a greater mutual respect, as women are a commonplace in their sports. An example of this is a cross-country team. They may not race together, but they practice together and are able to observe one another's athletic habits and ambitions. Sports like football can't replicate that practice with field hockey, or baseball with softball due to its institutional separation. Many of the sportsmen who are responsible for harassing, assaulting, or even raping women have been taught what the woman thinks of as rape, is actually sex in his eyes through socialization. The issue at large is that these behaviors are accepted when they

should be treated as “deviant [and], not normal.”¹¹⁴ Sexual crimes are not the only ones that are common in the world of sports; another is domestic violence which faces similar issues that surround sexual assault. Sports as a male world is what affects most female athletes on a daily basis, and is political, whether they know it or not.

Besides exhibiting issues in regard to male authority figures, there is an element to keep sports as a boys club. Sport can be referred to as “the last bastion of male domination.”¹¹⁵ It can be viewed in this way down to the various ways men and the institution of athletics exclude women, for example with the sport of football. Within Title IX, there are amendments protecting football so it stays masculine, such as the Javits Amendment. Football was one of the sports that was granted extra funding due to its popularity. Sports is often utilized in uniting American men, either by playing it or even enjoying it. Whether men are watching or playing there is often a greater chance they are watching male leagues or playing with other men. With Title IX continuing to exist and helping to increase the number of female athletes, more women are compelled to not only start sports but to continue with them. Female athletes are showing that they too can be strong, fast, tough and have all the elements it takes to be a high-level athlete. As this happens, there is conflict within masculinity, which institutionally is regarded as dominant, there is an attempt to remove any form of femininity, including women who are successful athletes. As women continue to not only succeed in athletics and the public sector as a whole, there is backlash from men who think of sport as their escape from women and femininity, which is embedded in American sports culture for as long as it has existed, and is a political implication. The concept of a sports culture has many negative connotations that are tied to

¹¹⁴ Burton Nelson, 153.

¹¹⁵ Burton Nelson, 6.

masculinity in American society. Mariah Burton Nelson states that “within a sports arena, a man can express racist, sexist, and homophobic attitudes not tolerated in many other parts of society. The public degeneration of women (and minority men) has become a mainstay of the American sporting experience...”¹¹⁶ Burton Nelson is not only referring to the put-down of women in general, along with sports women, she is also referring to American sports culture's complicated relationship with race and queerness. This dialogue is often referred to as locker-room talk, as it is a sacred place for male athletes to gather outside of their respective arena, but away from authority, and general society. Sports culture influences certain behaviors that have been exiled from every other sect of public life, yet the sacredness of masculinity within sport uplifts these behaviors not accepted elsewhere. Sexism within the sports culture is a badge of honor worn by men. At times male athletes are called “girls,” “women”, and “ladies” as a punishment if they played poorly or were not working hard enough. This frames women as weak in the eyes of male athletes within the male sport structure. Diving deeper within sexism as a common trope in sport, is the Venn diagram of words and phrases that are used with sports and sex. The utilization of bases in baseball and specific sex acts with a woman's body is a common example. This may be why many women are not interested in playing sports or even being fans of sports because of its intimate relationship with masculinity and with the women's body—without a single woman present.

Women still choose to exist in sport and choose to be fans of sports despite the strength of the masculine sports culture. That may be because “sports is a women’s issue because males on playing fields, male athletes learn to talk about and think about women and women’s bodies with

¹¹⁶ Burton Nelson, 7.

contempt.”¹¹⁷ Proving that male athletes are often taught to look down at women, therefore they look down at female athletes in that way. Sociologist Susan Burwell encapsulates this idea stating that “it’s a short leap from seeing men as physically superior to seeing men superior period.”¹¹⁸ This idea justifies why women must be present in sport, because their existence in the community pushes back on male superiority, not only in sport but within society itself. There is the fear that women’s strength threatens male dominance, which is legitimate in the sense that women will not stop participating in sports and striving to exceed their potential as athletes, but it is not in spite of men. Women participating in sport and gaining the strength required to succeed is for their joy and empowerment, along with being an individual right which is granted to all citizens within the United States. Since sport has been designed with the emphasis of the masculine “the female challenge to men’s sports is not just, ‘We want to play too.’ We want to play in neither a ladylike or man-like fashion. We want men to relinquish their treehouse mentality–No Girls Allowed– but we also want them to stop using sports to justify brutish behavior. To Stop using sports to define maleness and thus femaleness.”¹¹⁹ Sport should be a place of neutrality in which any person regardless of gender (or any other marginalized identity) should be able to enjoy without having to adhere to the strictness of masculinity. Not only should women be allowed to play, they should be visible when they play. Throughout women’s history in sport, many men have tried to push them out to preserve the masculine, even literally. When Katherine Switzer became the first woman to run in a marathon, she was met by angry men who tried to shove her off the course and hurled nasty language to encourage her to drop out. An early example is men accusing women of using bike seats as sex devices rather than a bike seat itself.

¹¹⁷ Burton Nelson, 9.

¹¹⁸ Quoted in Burton Nelson, 7.

¹¹⁹ Burton Nelson, 12-13.

Accusations like this were common for women, and are not eradicated presently in sports. The example with the bike seat speaks to something larger within sport, which is the masculine dominance in all regards including the shape of a bike seat. It is not a secret that there are differences between the male and female body. What may have looked like a sexual act to a male biker could have simply been a woman adjusting to a sport that never sought to include her in the first place. The sexualization of women from the masculine perspective helps keep women in their assigned role within a patriarchal society. Unlike Goldilocks, nothing is considered ‘just right’ for women in athletics. Pushing the narrative that women athletes exist for male pleasure emphasizes the power of the masculine domain, and the absence of power that women have. Women as sexual objects and not people is a strategy to put down their athletic excellence and to “help assure his difference from women in a world where his functions have come to resemble theirs.”¹²⁰ This can be done by sexualizing women as previously mentioned, and by using “manly sports” that include tackling and higher rates of contact than they do in the women’s version.¹²¹ The most common example is football due to the absence of women as players even in a gender segregated manner. Sports are about distinction and sex, grouped with gender acts as the greatest one. Physically, women have many advantages over men; they are just not regarded for this, especially in the media. For example, marathon swimming is an event where women compete and succeed at many ages. Many things that women do in their game speak to the advantages they have biologically. We are unaware of said advantages because the various institutions wrapped within sports as a whole don’t point them out, such as physiology or the media. Mariah Burton Nelson was onto something when she pointed out that you can’t compare boxers of

¹²⁰ Burton Nelson, 54.

¹²¹ Burton Nelson, 54-55.

different weight classes to one another, so why do we do it with men and women? Boxers of different weight classes are not necessarily better than one another when it comes to ability, they are just inherently different. Women too are different, which is why when they exist in the masculine, they are going to be compared to men, but women are more than just their differences to men. Women are often framed as catching up to men (which they are according to law), but within the structure of sport in how it exists, that is not possible. This is because women don't have the same access to a structure that is catered to their bodies and their sports in the way that men of all ages have had access to. Women can't reach their full potential because they don't have the resources to do so. Difference is used as a synonym of inferior which is false by its very definition. Femininity is different but not inferior which begs the question what does femininity look like within sports?

Chapter 6: Girls Go To College To Get More Knowledge, Boys Go To Jupiter to Get More Stupider

Femininity

It has been established that sports execute a specific gender identity within society, but within that masculine identity there is a whole series of sports that are categorized as feminine. Femininity in sport is complicated, as it was not supposed to exist in the first place. Now that it does, it faces many difficulties that don't exist for men when it comes to athletics. There are more men playing sports, watching sports, and being covered by the media across all platforms. In the media, men's sports are often framed as meaningful and dynamic elements of the culture, while women who play sports often are unable to see their heroes in the spotlight as men do with popular coverage. Many female athletes, such as Alex Morgan, Serena Williams, Megan

Rapinoe, Sue Bird, Simone Biles, and Naomi Osaka have used their popular status in an attempt to support all women athletes across all sports and with various issues that women face. They are not the only athletes doing this but they are the most recognizable in the media today for their contributions in addition to their sport. When women are covered in the media, the biggest element recognized is when a woman becomes the first to do something. Although these women are doing groundbreaking things, it is also backhanded in the eyes of the media. An example of backhanded content is within women's coverage, their misses or mistakes are covered as failures, but when men miss during coverage they are more often forgiven for such mistakes. This is determined by the language the commentators use surrounding the sport event. Another example is when a woman does something for the first time, it still frames her femininity within sport as lesser to the masculine dominant because it is a reminder of how far behind women are in sports. It instills the idea that women are inferior to men aesthetically and are most likely not catching up anytime soon. Though these accomplishments are meaningful and undoubtedly athletically exceptional, they still are treated as devices to maintain the sport structure the way it is. The press is also responsible for the collision of sexuality and athletics. Women's sports are covered unstably by the press and when they are, they have masculine undertones. If the media accepts a muscular woman, then she must be beautiful. She can't be muscular and challenge the image of femininity, she needs to be sexually desired to the American hegemonic society. Playing like a man is a double-edged sword. Women who go against the grain are ignored by the media, and if they are featured in the media, they are accused of being feminist. If she's a feminist, then she can no longer be desirable as she complicates the role that she was supposed to play. When women are spoken to in regards to their sport, they are more often to be asked about their lives

outside of sport while men rarely get asked about such things. It is already political to be a woman in sport, but to add an additional layer of politicality, cancels out women's legitimacy in the eyes of the male institution. The most legitimate coverage of female athletes is the Olympics because of its global power and cultural relevance, as it is also an opportunity to watch sports that are not regarded by the American media. The issues that come with sports journalism and women are minimized due to the larger-than-life impact the Olympics have when they come around.

When athleticism and women are discussed, a common connotation is the comparisons made to the Amazonian women, who are described as female warriors with masculine strength, and even serves as the influence for the DC superheroine "Wonder Woman." The striking connection of Amazon women to female athletes is the emphasis on masculinity. The mythological image of the Amazon woman is how her strength and athleticism is accredited to her masculine qualities when describing the modern sportswoman. This illustrates that when women are athletic and considered athletic, there is an underlying masculinity to them. Etymologically, there is no word describing strength that is feminine, at least in the English language, which minimizes how strength is perceived. The grace of a gymnast or a figure skater could be visual examples of what feminine strength looks like. The greatest example of all is women playing as a feminine being in a masculine world of sport. Masculinity in sports was associated with lesbianism as well as Blackness. The sport of track and field and the Black female's success that it's associated with, is often interpreted as a manish rendition of women within sport. Not only does it signify misogyny, but a racist outlook as well. Pressing racial identity to track categorized the sport not only as Black, but as masculine. To this day, it still

holds discriminatory connection to women, specifically Black women in the sport. Since masculinity is frowned upon in women's sports, and certain sports like football represent masculinity as the general pawn for the pushing of women out of sports, it is important to discuss why full frontal femininity is so essential to women's sports culture. Clothing and the pageantry aspect of femininity within sports really came about in the 1950s.¹²² The concept of body image was in fashion, so in terms of women in sport, there was masculine influence in promoting male pleasure through the female athlete's uniform. Today, "attention on physical appearance and dress has female athletes still judged for their sex appeal, not their athletic zeal."¹²³ Regardless of talent, female athletes are still often reduced to their sheer sex appeal. Dress signals social standing, and through this frame, shows that women dress to please while men dress to win. There is a focus on the female figure and not the person connected to that figure and the feats it itself can accomplish. Scholars McDonagh & Pappano claim that women's sports are a vehicle and not an end to itself because it minimizes athletic potential. By this, they are arguing that women have unlocked doors in sports but have not broken them down, as they are still bound to one another in a separate sect from men and men's sport.¹²⁴ Women could practice social fitness, but could not compete. Competition was argued against for women because it didn't prepare them for womanhood itself, it disrupted the social goals expected of women. The concept that women would unbecome their gender and become manish was and still is socially disruptive within America. The idea that women cannot play with men because they may become men, is

¹²² McDonagh & Pappano, 169.

¹²³ McDonagh & Pappano, 170.

¹²⁴ McDonagh & Pappano. 171.

embedded in culture which is why gender segregation is so closely tied to women's sports and American politics.

One of the biggest instigators that are complicit in leaving women behind in the world of sports is journalism and media. Sports media is dominated by male sports with the primary culprits being football, basketball, and baseball. Media of all types can be utilized as political to help represent, define, and re-define culture. When it comes to sports, how the media showcases gender and sex is referred to as sex-typing and perpetuates certain identities with certain genders. This can include advertisements from companies that are considered sports brands, such as Nike who launched a campaign entitled the “Everyday Athlete.”¹²⁵ In this campaign, Nike tried to show that anyone can be an athlete, and that casual athletes can exist too. In Nike’s case, these casual athletes serve as customers. When the ad was launched, they used women to commercialize the products and target them as a demographic. In one way, Nike acknowledged women everywhere (pros or not) can be athletes, but at the same time, they utilize women and girls as commodities of exchange based on the idea of empowerment.¹²⁶ The campaign targeted women but essentially used women and encouraged them to be athletic in a visible way, but not visible enough to compete with men. The campaign “others” women by giving them their own sports market in separation from male counterparts. Rather than just promoting their products to all athletes they gender it to appeal to the gender-segregated structure in sports that already exists at the expense of the woman’s body. It shows Nike as a company’s allegiance to maintain the status quo and utilizing it as a business model within the media. It profit-izes women’s bodies. Since women are now accepted in the public sphere, with the help of the indoctrination by Title

¹²⁵ Michael D. Giardina and Jennifer L. Metz, “Women’s Sports in Nike’s America: Body Politics and the Corporo-Empowerment of ‘Everyday Athletes,’” in *Sport, Culture and Advertising* (Routledge, 2004). 63.

¹²⁶ Giardina and Metz. 63.

IX, they can then be deemed profitable. To be active, women and girls are required to look feminine. It is an expectation of their gender role within society they act a certain way to showcase that. Nike is not the only corporation to utilize female athletes as a political tool to promote their products or put a direct image of what a female athlete should look like. This act separates women whose bodies are not the advertised size, who don't consider themselves athletes, are queer, women of color, and isolate genderqueer people. To be athletic is to reflect the social role that the perfect feminine woman is supposed to play. The press, as an extension itself, submits to this ideology and reinforces it with their content. The idea that women are inferior and different from men is continually proliferated because it cannot be refuted.

Co-Ed Sport

Sports that are designed “for girls” in the United States, can range from volleyball, dance, cheerleading, gymnastics, ice skating, as well as some that are slowly becoming “girl” sports like soccer, field hockey, and basketball. When a sport is conceived as inherently feminine, it is looked down upon within society, and more specifically in sport. Girls are encouraged to play these sports due to its alignment with society's expectation of being feminine and because it does not interfere with male athletes and the sports they predominantly play. Because these sports are considered feminine when men play them, they are frowned upon as soft, or even “gay” due to the relationship with femininity. In terms of cheerleading as a sport specifically, they are not often called athletes, but when it is regarded as a sport it shows that there is “feminine” interest in sport outside of the masculine realm. When cheerleading is not in the competitive arena, they are cheering as spectators to male sports like football. Today cheerleaders cheer for more than just men's football and basketball, but even cheer for women. Although when they cheer for

women, it is recognized as a demotion by the structure of athletics because women are less valued as athletes. Cheerleading is only tried and true if it is for men, despite how demeaning such placement is to the women cheering and the established role of women within society. Laurel Davis calls this concept a “postmodern paradox.”¹²⁷ Not only is cheerleading categorized as a feminine sport, but there is an element to voyeurism in the sense that they are present at men’s games which define their relationship as hegemonic, promoting the idea of women being the second sex compared to men placing a political identity by choosing to maintain within the establishment of masculinity. Cheerleading presents a conflict because it is targeted to girls, and girls become women who participate in both the spectator aspect of the sport as well as the competitive aspect separate from the spectation. Another element of cheerleading is that it is often co-ed. Men do participate within the sport at a much lower rate, and face the accusations of being gay, as they do with other feminine sports. It is important to acknowledge that cheering is not just for women, but overwhelmingly female even though men can participate (usually in a co-ed manner). This differs from cross-country as a co-ed sport because cheering at games and competition is not segregated, which situates the sport within its own category that is quite rare in how sport operates. Women have clear interests and it takes a great deal of athleticism to be a great cheerleader, but it is often not understood that way by masculine sport standards and traditional feminine sport. The sport itself is an outlier in comparison to its counterparts across the sect.

Throughout youth to pro sports, there are sports that are co-ed. Before the concept of co-ed sports can come into play, it must be established as to how it would affect women if

¹²⁷ Laurel Davis, “A Postmodern Paradox? Cheerleader at Women’s Sporting Events,” in *Women, Sport, and Culture*, ed. Susan Birrell and Cheryl L. Cole (Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics, 1994), 149–58.

implemented today, in which the system stands. It can reinforce that men and women should continue to be segregated in separate domains. Most women at this point in time have not commonly competed with men due to segregation. There is also fear that women will play with men and the concept of their weakness would be reinforced through their inevitable failure to compete with men. The reliance of stereotypes augments what women can and cannot do with their athletic ability. Often we are most likely not even aware of women's full athletic potential because they are lagging in the world of sports. The expectation that within integrated sports that women will fail isn't necessarily a fair claim. One example of men and women co-existing in sport was Margaret Murdock who was the first woman to earn a gold medal in an international match in the sport of shooting. In the 1976 Olympics, she tied her male teammate, but the gold was awarded to her male teammate. By 1996, men's and women's shooting was completely segregated with men having 10 events while women had 7, along with many other amenities having to do with equipment in favor of the men.¹²⁸ Murdock shows that women can and will not only beat other women but also men in sport. It shows that in terms of ability, women and men are comparable at least in shooting but there is a possibility that this can and has happened in other sports that both men and women play.

Co-ed sports have a great advantage when considering inclusivity as if sports are co-ed, especially starting from a youth level, gender queer people across the spectrum can participate. Integrating gender diversity within a co-ed environment will normalize all forms of gender within sports competing together with the goal of removing stigma surrounding the issue. Gender segregation runs the risk of categorizing a gender queer person in a category in which they do

¹²⁸ McDonagh and Pappano, 12.

not identify. A way in which co-ed sports can come into play, at more of an amateur level at first, would be to categorize by autonomous self determination. This would define an athlete to the gender of choosing rather than their sex (or assigned sex at birth), as “sport informs particular conceptions of gender,” but it doesn't have to.¹²⁹ The argument against this idea is those who will fake their gender to achieve success. In most cases, this concept is rare, and each person develops their gender identity differently, so the odds of something like that happening is not common. The current gendered system fails to protect gender identity and expression which creates a regime on the basis of gender, which will always exclude certain people as an expression of the system. A way for co-ed sports to exist could be through weight or height class, as Mariah Burton Nelson mentioned. An example is a dog show. Toy dogs don't compete with your working dogs simply because they are different and not because one is better than the other per se. What a toy dog does includes things working dogs do not and vice versa. In one federal case that passed through Ohio, the judge framed women playing sports with men as a personal choice, aligning with the Fourteenth Amendment's Equal Protection Clause that women could participate where they would like due to their constitutional access to individuality. Though this legally may be the case, it is socially frowned upon that the idea of a female athlete as an individual bound to choice doesn't get put into practice. As, “Title IX's permission to sex segregate contact sports effectively led to universal sex segregation in virtually all sports.”¹³⁰ Gender segregation was not a precedent until Title IX made it one. Sex segregation is contradictory within the education acts because Title VII removed gendered labels on jobs, so no occupations by the law would be

¹²⁹ Shin, “Sex and Gender Segregation in Competitive Sport.” 60.

¹³⁰ McDonagh & Pappano, 221.

Playing With the Boys: Why Separate Is Not Equal in Sports.

gender associated. If they were, it was due to social standing, but on paper every job became labeled as gender neutral, yet with sports it appears to be a different case. Legislation now becomes responsible for organizing men's and women's sport as distinct entities. Since women choose to play sports, as it is their right as American individuals, they should be entitled to the right to play with men or continue to play with men, and not be deterred from playing with all genders is something that has existed and still exists even with Title IX in place. They should segregate because they want to, not because they have to.

Within youth sports co-ed participation is more common, but girls still are socialized to understand their place within sport which is separated away from men's sport. A common belief is that "real sports are for boys in order to develop their sense of masculinity and male privilege, girls are systematically marginalized and taught that they are a weak and inferior sex."¹³¹ Marginalization within sport is not something women come to realize as young adults, it is taught to them as kids, so that they are made aware of their place within the institution, so they are not to disrupt it. This formulates in many ways. Girls may be more concerned with their body image or what sport they decide to play or the sports their parents would prefer them to play. Once a place where the socialization of women in sport is evident in affecting how they approach sports as an activity is their preference for coaches. Since there are less women in the sports space overall the amount of girls who have experienced more than one female coach are in the minority, but for the most part, every girl has had a male coach before. In a survey collected by Anika Varpalotai in her research of girls who play ringette (an alternative version to hockey), found that "the male presence in the subculture of women's sport, packaged in the ideology of

¹³¹ Varpalotai, Aniko. "Sport, Leisure and the Adolescent Girl: Single Sex vs. Co-Ed?." *Canadian Woman Studies/les cahiers de la femme* (1995). 30.

male superiority, means that even that space which allows women to express themselves both physically and emotionally in a potentially empowering experience of individual strength and female solidarity is undermined and tainted.”¹³² From a young age, girls become quite aware of who their authority figures ought to be, as well as role models as a result of male-dominated media due to the systemic structure of sports. This presents a reality that there are no women in male-dominated spaces, which is false. Young female athletes should be taught the reality of the sports institution, while also being taught that they can be part of the generation that can transform it to be more female accessible. In the same Varpaloti study, many of the girls preferred to play in a single-sex environment because the boys had a tendency to take over. In a segregated environment they felt that they had the opportunity to be themselves than they did when playing with the boys.¹³³ In the space with boys, the girls felt more insignificant than without in this specific case (which can vary per sport, and per club). Most girls assumed that co-ed environments were equal, that’s until they entered a same-sex environment, when they realized their autonomy within these specific sport spaces were limited. This speaks to the importance of the presence of empowerment in women's sports to help overcome such debilitating setbacks, especially within spaces dominated by men like sports.

Chapter 7: Youth – College Sports, Exploitation and the NCAA

Youth Sports

Youth sports are the foundation to all further institutions of sport, so how it is structured is a vital contribution to what sport acts as in society. Throughout history, the freedom of children has increased, as it became frowned upon that children should work, and the American

¹³² Varpalotai, Aniko. "Sport, Leisure and the Adolescent Girl: Single Sex vs. Co-Ed?." 31.

¹³³ Varpalotai, Aniko. "Sport, Leisure and the Adolescent Girl: Single Sex vs. Co-Ed?." 33.

economic structures allowed children to enjoy being children. A key component to childhood is play, and the socialization that comes with play that helps children develop into teenagers and then into adulthood. As long as sports have formerly existed, clubs and sports networks have too existed. Some of the biggest sport systems are embedded in youth sport. Clubs and networks are as old as modern sport as we know it. These networks are key to the longevity of the clubs that sit within the sports community, especially at the youth level. Clubs are accredited to the development of American athletes as they have become a requirement to achieve sport success. It also holds power as a categorizing structure, which can dictate social position. Today, sport clubs extend far beyond town-sponsored rec teams, and require a pay-to play model, so the wealthier the child's background, the more likely they are to play, and continue to play than the children of lesser means. Many clubs require lot's of parent participation whether it is coaching, managing, hosting, or providing transportation, it is a commitment for the parents as well. In this regard, clubs have an agenda to help their athletes achieve athletic success, even if it may not be advertised as so. Clubs are more than just opportunities to play, but social environments to indoctrinate children into the athletic community with the hope that they can specialize in a sport and go as far as they can with it starting from ages as early as three.

College is often the center of discussion when it comes to gender dynamics in athletics, especially in regards to Title IX. This can be due to the entanglement of structure with the education system and the federal government, as well as the key third party, the NCAA. Where there is structure and young adults, there is exploitation present. The exploitation of athletes by all of the programs mentioned are common and not strictly tied to sex or gender, but to any demographic that the programs can gain from. A fair exchange does not exist between athletes

and the structure of institutions. Some of the greatest issues, when it comes to exploitation, is within the bigger leagues at the highest college level: Division I. Student-athletes across the board face many realms of exploitation. One is academics. The student is meant to be emphasized first as indicated in the term “student-athlete” and it often isn’t. The bigger the school, the more important revenue and success is. There is constant pressure to remain relevant commercially. Because student-athletes are funded by scholarship, they struggle more maintaining a traditional four-year timeline with the demands of their sport, especially within a season. It can complicate social life and keep many students bound to their team and other athletes. The biggest form of exploitation is the physicality that comes with being an athlete and the demand on the body, which translates to the mind. When the body is tired, it makes it harder for the brain to operate to its full capacity, which carries over to the difficulties of being a student and athlete. Athletes sacrifice their long-term health for short-term outcomes. Injuries, improper recovery are common, along with eating disorders to maintain the physique of a competitive athlete per sport. Body image is a sore subject to college athletes, but women face the implications more than male athletes. Due to the sex differences between men and women, women face a greater difficulty in regard to how their physical health is taken care of. This includes emotional health as well. This issue can be tied back to the lack of physiological research of women’s bodies and athletic capacities. Without this research being present, female collegiate athletes are at a greater risk than their male peers. The difficulty of being a college athlete is that college is an environment where the transition from youth to young adult is present, but athletes are still bound to coaches’ authority, more than a standard student's relationship to a professor. The dynamic is more intimate, and essential to a team. Often college

athletes struggle with being treated as children even though they are in fact adults. As mentioned earlier, sexual assault can be a burden that women face far more than men, but is not the only form of exploitation that is more common for women. The exploitation of female athletes can be more severe but also more invisible. Eliane Blinde calls this “institutionalized powerlessness” which applies to both their role as women and as athletes.¹³⁴ Blinde continues to go on to state, “female athletes are exploited at the hands of patriarchal or patriarchal values and structures and are disadvantaged in a sports system that is overwhelmingly organized, administered, and dominated by men.”¹³⁵ They are secondary when it comes to sports; they are treated as secondary in our patriarchal, hegemonic society. The privatization of sports mitigates equity within sports and is a strategy that is implemented starting at youth sport. Rather than maintaining high-quality rec leagues and clubs, the pay-to-play models become required and the attempt to produce a college athlete, let alone a professional. This privatization is also a shortcut around Title IX requirements because they are private and have no federal support, so gender standards can be exploited, along with class and race, which keep the current sport model alive to be maintained throughout the college level.

Chapter 8: External Political Identity

Feminism in Sport

Many roots of feminism have to do with the relationship of a woman with her body. Women in sport represent a specific and important relationship with the feminine body, which is why it is often a catalyst for feminism and feminist thought. A component of body politic,

¹³⁴ Elaine Blinde, “Unequal Exchange and Exploitation in College Sport: The Case of the Female Athlete,” in *Women, Sport, and Culture*, ed. Susan Birrell and Cheryl L. Cole (Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics, 1994), 135–148. 145.

¹³⁵ Elaine Blinde, “Unequal Exchange and Exploitation in College Sport: The Case of the Female Athlete.” 145.

especially with women, is that the experience they go through with their body is a shared one. The shared experience can then be recognized as a political demand.¹³⁶ Shared experience offers recognition, but on the other hand, constrained agency, meaning they can only do so much with the experience they have been granted. This can be done through experience with the body as well as experiences as a certain identity. A response to the destructive nature of female body politics is mastering. This is why women in sports can be a feminist experience because it is not expected of a woman in American society to have full ownership over her body, even when she is using it in empowering ways.¹³⁷ It can be the feminist approach to power through the utilization of one's own body or the shared experience of multiple female bodies. When women participate in sports, it is considered a feminist act, just as any other profession does when a lone woman or a small group enter into a predominantly masculine field. However, just because a woman is present in a masculine space does not mean she is feminist by default. When in a dominant space, the patriarchal structure still exists, and women are understood to be marginalized, not only by her male peers but by the structure in which she has entered. Take the trailblazing first woman Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher: She defied gender roles by being in power, but she famously had few to no women in her cabinet. It was expected of her, as a woman in power, to lift up more women, but her British conservative values were still a core part of her identity, even if those values did not necessarily benefit all women. She is often remembered by day for serving as the Prime Minister, and in the evening, playing wife and cooking her husband dinner. Her feminine image is not one that is considered feminist, but the fact that she was a

¹³⁶ Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins." 159.

¹³⁷ Elaine M. Blinde, Diane E. Taub, and Lingling Han, "Sport Participation and Women's Personal Empowerment: Experiences of the College Athlete," *Journal of Sport and Social Issues* 17, no. 1 (April 1, 1993): 47–60, <https://doi.org/10.1177/019372359301700107>. 50.

woman in power makes her perceived to be an active feminist which she is not considered often. Thatcher is not the only example, and it is a commonly debated issue within feminist discourse. Women who play sports face a similar scrutiny within feminism as it is viewed as supremely masculine in its practice, which some women think goes against what it means to be a true feminist. Marxist feminists, who have roots in socialism, believe that society will never be equal unless organized male structures, such as sports, don't exist. On the other hand, there is feminist support due to the sports masculine identity; Women being present can reclaim the space and mark it as feminism. Scholar Lois Byron states that "if we [women] vacate the scene, we merely support masculine hegemony."¹³⁸ In order for women to push for equality, they must be present. If they are present, then equity needs to be present. This forces the masculine to keep trying to construct and redefine itself to hold its power. The more women are present, the more difficulty masculinity has hanging on within the space, but that is only one argument within the feminist movement. The existence of sport in itself faces backlash across feminism which complicates it as a political sphere. Feminism also struggles to grapple with sex difference and sex equality in terms of sport. Title IX enforces this idea by being ingrained with the ideal of second wave liberal feminism, which is not the state of feminist discourse today, yet the law carries it on. It acts as a barrier in uniting feminism surrounding sport, which complicates their political agendas in changing the state of women's rights in the sphere. Identity politics is central to feminism and most advocacy movements, especially in regards to a marginalized group who are defined by their "othering" identity. Aligning with an identity is a strategy for building a community or coalition behind one common ideal or goal.¹³⁹ How the identity of woman, or the identity beyond

¹³⁸ Lois Bryson, "Sport and the Maintenance of Masculine Hegemony." 62.

¹³⁹ Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins." 159.

woman is approached affects how such groups can mobilize within the movement they are drawn to. The purpose of creating an identity is important because with every women's movement, there is historically a backlash movement within women as a category. One of the modern examples would be Phyllis Schlafly, who was a pivotal figure fighting against the ERA. Within women as a gender, there is internal conflict that is complicit in women's oppression (as an example: pro Title IX vs. anti arguments). Scholars McDonagh & Pappano state that sex is something we receive accidentally at birth, so to think it is essentially the backbone to how we categorize ourselves within society is quite shocking.¹⁴⁰ Sport could be a sect of society where feminism and women's liberation can assist in redefining gender roles, even if it is an agent of women's oppression. One interest of feminism within sport is that some women want to sacrifice men's interest in favor of women. In one way, sport as a pivotal political transformation can be accredited to Black male athletes. They had advocacy groups (as women do) but there were no internal advocacy groups opposed to the goal of achieving equality. "What is significant about sex as an ascriptive group difference and about women as a subordinate group in American society compared to men, therefore, is that the couldn't and shouldn't attitude based on concerns related to women's inferiority, women's injury, and women's immorality is not limited to male concerns about changing the gender order, but also to female concerns."¹⁴¹ In this quote, McDonagh & Pappano point to how women not only face their oppressors, but face oppressors within the group of women as a whole, which makes it that much more difficult to achieve goals of equality and transformation. Figures such as Schlafly distinctly associated themselves against the women's movement, but in the realm of sport, it is feminists that are both for and against

¹⁴⁰ McDonagh and Pappano, *Playing With the Boys: Why Separate Is Not Equal in Sports*. 202.

¹⁴¹ McDonagh and Pappano, 203.

gender separation in women's sports. The overall goal is unclear, and the interpretation of equality amongst feminist as a group differs. There is no progress to any side's ideal end result.

Identity and opposite identity are just as much part of the feminist movement as those that sit outside of it or even sit within and remain other. The split identity within feminism works against feminism because it dilutes a common goal. Rather, if the othered group (women) were to team up with the "othered" within the category of women (women of color, queer women, etc.), then more power could be accessed in reaching their goal. Often this approach is ignored in the fear of having the marginalized group within the feminist movement be the reason to hold back the process to the correlation with their identity and the place it holds in politics. In "Mapping the Margins," Kimberlé Crenshaw states, "race, gender and other identity categories are most often treated in mainstream liberal discourse as vestiges of bias or domination—that is, as intrinsically negative frameworks in which social power works to exclude or marginalize those who are different."¹⁴² Delineating groups within groups should be a form of empowerment, not a state of domination. In terms of sport this would be a white, liberal, feminist approach (that often may not even be considered feminist). For example, administrators/athletes that may check more than one box of a marginalized identity, may find it difficult to assimilate with all components of their identity in their sports environment, so they choose to lean on the one that will gain them the most legitimacy. This strategy often alienates the personnel part of the identity they feel forced to hide.¹⁴³ It can be easier to lean into privilege rather than fighting it if one has access to any, because it applies to the system that is already in place. Race, gender, sexuality, etc. is immersed in power dynamics which dictates the response to it in the first place. The

¹⁴² Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins." 160.

¹⁴³ Krane.19-20.

intersectional identities are just as important to feminists in achieving their political goal because, “the need to account for multiple grounds of identity when considering how the social world is constructed.”¹⁴⁴ Sport as a rendition of the social construction of American politics must rely on intersectionality, or else all marginalized figures will fail to see progress, and therefore even white women will not achieve their full potential unless they take everyone with them. This is why the emphasis on Title IX is framed through equality rather than equity, because it intentionally leaves behind those who are required to be raised in an equitable manner because it would overturn the power system in place within sports. Not all intersectional subordination is done on purpose, and happens irrespective of good intentions, but some is, and spotting the difference between the two is irrelevant, because they often lead to the same outcome. Similarly to Maya Angelou, Kimberlé Crenshaw believes that feminism is only feminism when all women are included (which should include people, who may not even identify as women).¹⁴⁵ Women should and are tired of having to advocate for women, and need support, especially from one another.¹⁴⁶ Often in sports, competition is the pinnacle, but in terms of having the right to play, women as a whole should lean into the teamwork aspect to succeed in overcoming the competition of a lifetime: patriarchy. Feminism can exist within sport as an external political identity, but it is not what determines women for having a political identity in sport, it is their presence in sport itself that determines it as such.

¹⁴⁴ Crenshaw, “Mapping the Margins.” 160.

¹⁴⁵ Crenshaw. 163.

¹⁴⁶ Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*. 242.

Activism Within Sport

Throughout sports history, especially American sports history there is a prominent relationship with athletes using their larger than life platforms to exercise their political beliefs. Athletes that have done this include boxer Muhammed Ali, sprinters John Carlos and Tommie Smith at the 1968 Olympics, various teams within the WNBA, and NBA, Colin Kaepernick, and Megan Rapinoe. All of which were met with immense support as well as backlash in their endeavors of political exercise. For the athletes that identified as women, an external identity was placed on top of their already political identity with their political statements. The most common form of activism is protest, as it can be a small gesture that states big things like Kaepernick's infamous kneel during the playing of the National Anthem before NFL games to make a statement about racialized police brutality. More recently, the Women's National Soccer Team of Canada have been wearing their uniforms inside out in protest against their federation from denying them fair compensation compared to their male counterparts, who have a lower international ranking than they do (a common occurrence between national team federations in the sport of soccer globally).¹⁴⁷ All of these examples point to a close relationship between sport and politics. Most of the political messages that are pursued in the athletic realm are ones that are to advocate for the marginalized and oppressed, which can include the athletes themselves, as well as the community they wish to represent on their behalf. Sport, as a cultural device, can extend to various audiences beside the existence of political differences. How such sport is consumed by an audience can be interpreted much differently, but ultimately it represents a diverse group of people across the United States, also depending on what sport and what league

¹⁴⁷ It is important to note that the Canadian women already hold the political identity by being women, and their form of protest carries heavier than their male counterparts, but for the sake of recognizing current events I have utilized them as an example to justify my overall claim.

is being broadcasted. Not all forms of political protests and engagement in sports are treated equally, and it depends on who the figurehead of a movement is, as well as the identity in which the athletes come from/represents. Many famous (infamous to many) movements come from Black male athlete Americans, which could be a hypothesis as to why politics are so central to sport. Black male athletes have achieved great success in moving the discourse within sport to include other athletes of their own race, and even Black women. The integration of baseball was an example mentioned earlier that came about by Black advocacy groups. Influence, in general, is a form of political power, and because of the importance of sports in American society, it comes with athletic celebrity as well. Sport celebrity is a specific form of celebrity that can be defined “as a celebrity politician, meaning they are associating the celebrity status of athletes as something that is inherently political, as nature to the profession itself.”¹⁴⁸ The place of sport celebrity holds politicality across the board, and when it comes to race and gender, there is already an acting political presence that comes with the identity. Becoming a celebrity is another external dose of politicality upon the portion that is inherent within such identities, particularly with women. The appeal of a professional athlete who can act as a politician can help express a message that a politician can’t relay to the audience in the same way.¹⁴⁹ The identity of the athlete can help define the politics and foster a specific outcome. In the case of Colin Kaepernick, he was blacklisted from the NFL and a ban was placed on kneeling. Kaepernick, as a football player, was aware that he may not hold the political capabilities of a professional politician but he “understood...protest to be an effort to spotlight American racism and police

¹⁴⁸ Christopher C. Towler, Nyron N. Crawford, and Robert A. Bennett, “Shut Up and Play: Black Athletes, Protest Politics, and Black Political Action,” *Perspectives on Politics* 18, no. 1 (March 2020): 111–27, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592719002597>.

¹⁴⁹ Towler, Crawford, and Bennett.

brutality...” while also being aware of the “unique relationship between sports, politics, and athletic activism for Black America.”¹⁵⁰ Kaepernick, and other courageous individuals who are willing to express political concerns in the realm of sport, utilize the power of their celebrity due to the importance that sport holds on the culture. He and others realize they can tap into the sport fan base that relate to him most, and those who vehemently oppose him. Reaching both demographics allows him to push his point across. Kaepernick was blacklisted from the NFL and continues to be to this day, showing the ripple effect of his activism. In many ways, he was successful but in other ways, he was met with failure. Women have been responsible for similar activism for years, but have failed to make statements to the same level that men, especially Black men have made. This is due to several reasons, but the biggest comes down to celebrity. Women in sports don’t have the same celebrity status that men do across the board, and even less so when additional marginalized identities make up a person. The level of celebrity affects the outreach of their political message even if it is one that is highly beneficial. It is important to note that because a female athlete chooses to be political, on top of her already established political position, it does not make her a feminist. Being a feminist as a female athlete adds another external layer of politicality that male athletes don’t experience, unless they are already marginalized such as Black male athletes. Those male athletes still don’t have the internal layer of politicality that women do and don’t need to tack on several external layers of such politicality to even make their point, let alone get it across. With that being said, feminist movements and protest can be included under the umbrella of athletes’ political agendas within sports. Many athletes purposely ingrained politics in their sport career, while many choose to hide it, both are

¹⁵⁰ Towler, Crawford, and Bennett.

actively political messages. Sport has an intimate relationship with politics, as it is seen through visible personnel, and what is not seen on the systematic underbelly that is hiding in plain sight. Whether sports like it or not, they are a political extension of the American system in all regards, and the sooner they can embrace that, the faster change will come to marginalized athletes of all identities. Protest and other forms of activism can be used as a catalyst to prove and to move to a more equitable sports world. This includes embracing political identities that are within specific athlete demographics, those of which that are marginalized figures beyond the gender lines. Understanding one's own politicality and then putting it to use is how protest can turn to political action for the better. It takes far more than just the athletes who care, but athletes to support the ones that step forward, along with organizations that are responsible for the direct culture and structure of sports

Conclusion: Women's Sports Are Women's Rights

Sport as an issue comes off as arbitrary and vacuous when there are many other pressing issues affecting Americans daily, but sport can be a catalyst to improving it by providing opportunity. Reconceptualizing what sport is and what success looks like is how we change sports. Being set in the established systems is what intrinsically excludes those who have historically been excluded. Sports are expansive and a staple to American social and cultural life, whether they are liked by all or not. Either way, sport is not one thing but a plethora of things, and to push it into a box and expect it to be one thing is simply wrong. The beauty of sports is its difference in the things that stand out, so why are we bound to be the same when that is exactly what sport is against at its core? To celebrate sport is to celebrate differences and the various elements that make each sport and team unique, so to exclude the people that would enhance the

very core of sports is a complete strike out. It must be accepted that there is an inherent politicality of sport itself and the identities accounted for within sport, in this case, most specifically women. Women must be accepted intersectionally within sport, with the understanding that within their existence, they are political. Accepting this facet of their identity will guide us in accepting that women's sports is not operating in a way to overcome this inadvertent politicality. Women's sports is a women's issue and using Title IX as the example, womanhood is often compartmentalized and expected to be one thing and it is not. Womanhood and female-ness can be an infinity of identities and understandings, but it can't be decided through a one-dimensional law or court case precedents. To expand women's sports would be to expand women's rights and the additional marginalized identities that take on politicality within sport. Women's sports is in favor of women's rights and that includes all women, e.g. women of color, queer women, non-binary, genderqueer people, and especially the transwomen who are forced to sit in a realm on their own. Understanding the harmful effects of Title IX, the sport institute, media, gender segregation, gender roles, youth, and collegiate levels within sport, will help us find a way to overcome them and to many, these things may not have even been considered an issue. Throughout I have argued that women are inherently political in their identity, as a sex, a gender, and as members within the sport community. Within sport, which has been declared as a component of society and culture, it too is political. For women and others, the politicality may be an identity given once entering sport, or it can even be an added layer when participating in various forms of activism. Although, what is clear is that legislation meant to tackle discrimination is at the forefront of creating the identity of woman as political within sport. Nevertheless, it may have been proven that gender segregation is not the end all be all in

sports and utilizing co-ed strategies can be useful in some portions of the sport field to celebrate inclusivity. A strategy that may be useful would be to push for clarifications within Title IX that have a specific goal, rather than leaving it for the courts to interpret. Taking the assigned politicality and building a wanted political identity could be the key to taking sport back and reworking it into something far greater. The fact is the failure of women's sports in the United States has forced female athletes to become inherent political actors by simply existing and participating in a system that fails them each and every day. In order for American society to win at sports, and to do right by the people who enjoy them on and off the field, then we must break the rules that we have been told for far too long to follow, as they are constricting us from reaching our full potential, not only as individuals but as a society at large. There has never been a better moment than now to kick start a progressive inquiry within sport. Women are more engaged in the internal sport politicization and the momentum is at an all-time high. Despite the constant pushback, they have the tenacity to keep running the race in leveling the playing field.

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