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**A Post Title-IX Analysis of American Sports Culture: The Women Aren't Done Yet**

By  
Bridget Schauder

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Submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements in the Department of Sociology

Union College

March, 2021

## **Acknowledgements**

Thank you to my parents, Paul Schauder and Darcy Mayers for affording me the opportunity to earn an education from Union College. Union has provided me with a wealth of opportunities and set me up for an exciting future in the post graduate world.

Thank you to the entire Sociology Department at Union College for piquing my interest in the subject and allowing me to grow as a writer, researcher, and person. As Professor Cotter said, this major has allowed me to become “methodologically dangerous”. Thank you to my advisor Professor Hill Butler for the continual positive encouragement, support, and guidance throughout the entire thesis process. Your efforts did not go unnoticed.

Thank you to my subjects who provided great insight into working within collegiate athletics and the collegiate soccer players who participated in my survey collection.

Finally, this thesis is for every little girl with a big athletic dream -- you can and you will achieve it! People believe in you.

## **Abstract**

This thesis seeks to examine the disparities women continue to face in the realm of athletics since the enactment of Title IX in 1972. This research is important because throughout history women have been left behind in society compared to men and athletics is just another social space where that occurs. Additionally, sports are so important to American culture, yet women still struggle to gain the respect and recognition they deserve. Feminist theory suggests that sports are gendered activities because the knowledge is grounded in the values and experiences of men. This thesis uses interview and survey analysis to understand equity within collegiate sports. It was found that 82.1% of the surveyed collegiate athletes believe there are areas for improvement for women in athletics at the collegiate level. In the 49 years since the passing of Title IX, these findings suggest that structural change is happening at a slow, yet steady rate. Finally, this thesis leads to possible suggestions for change and allows for further discussion regarding the future of women's sports.

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## **Chapter 1: Literature Review**

### ***In the Literature: Introduction***

“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”

This thirty-seven word text block is the entirety of Title IX of the Education Amendments Act of 1972 (Ware, p. 3). Nowhere in the small provision does it mention athletics or suggest any major impact on the athletic rights for women. In fact, due to its particularly small size, Ware suggests that the “men and women who voted for Title IX didn't even know Title IX was there” (Ware, p.3). In the 49 years since the passage of Title IX, the term is almost synonymous with women’s athletics. The legislation originated from the widespread discrimination women faced in all aspects of the educational experience. The basis of Title IX is evidently not rooted in athletic equity for women, but rather the general sex discrimination in federally funded educational institutions. However, as time has passed and women earned a place at all male colleges -- 1970 for Union College -- Title IX has been largely associated with the gains women have made both in collegiate athletics and beyond.

### ***What is Title IX?***

President Richard Nixon signed the Education Amendments Act containing Title IX on June 23rd, 1972; however, the implementation of the law had a very slow start and the changing athletic circumstances revealed the flexibility of the piece of legislation (Ware, p.4-5). The short piece of legislation has three pillars of requirement for any school receiving federal funds: “participation opportunities for female students, athletic scholarship programs for female students (if they offer them for male students), and equal treatment of male and female athletes by their schools” (Buchanan, 92). Both private and public schools are required to follow Title IX

because they receive federal funding through federal financial aid programs used by their students (NCAA.org, 2020). Title IX has overwhelmingly and most socially notably improved athletic opportunities for women at the high school and collegiate levels. However, the provisions of the law applies to every aspect of a federally funded educational institution. Other applications of the law include, “course offerings, counseling and counseling materials, financial assistance, student health and insurance benefits and/or other services, housing, marital and parental status of students, physical education and athletics, education programs and activities, and employment” (NCAA.org, 2020). There is a three part check from the US Department of Education that is used in evaluating a schools compliance with the law. This three part test is used in court cases and is absurdly generous. A school is found to be compliant if,

“males and females participate in athletics in numbers substantially proportional to their enrollment numbers; or the school has a history and continuing practice of program expansion which is demonstrably responsive to the developing interests and abilities of members of the underrepresented sex; or the institution's existing programs fully and effectively accommodate the interests and abilities of the underrepresented sex” (Buchanan, 92).

Due to the flexibility and unspecified nature of the requirements many schools are able and do bend the rules a little to provide more for their most lucrative sports -- typically football.

Although there are some issues with the legislation, Title IX has created many positive outcomes for women. For myself, I would have never had the opportunity to meet lifelong friends, gain valuable time management skills, learn the value of competition, or truly understand that I am a confident, strong woman without the powerful women before me paving the way for all girls today.

### *Pre-Title IX and the Triumphs Afterwords*

The interesting thing about new pieces of legislation is that while Title IX may have changed sports for the better it did not mean that women did not participate in sports prior. The same is for legalizing gay marriage, just because it was not legal doesn't mean people did not engage in same sex relationships. I would argue that this new piece of legislation rather just means that the challenge at hand is now earning recognition. Before the passage of Title IX, Mariah Nelson argued that the empowerment women feel from sport began with the bicycle in the 1890s, then the slender transportation machine was used by thirty thousand American women (Smith, xii). However, even prior to that brave women competed in other sports such as tennis in 1884 at the first national women's championship at Wimbledon, or in boxing in 1876, or in shooting in 1885, globally even "the first women's sports magazine, *Hockey Field*, emerged in England in 1901" (Smith, xii). There are many factors that contribute to a woman's involvement in sport, one that is hard to ignore is the challenge to the patriarchy. Sports were designed and built for men and have been an institution that reproduces masculinity, so a woman's involvement directly challenges that society standard.

Title IX came about because of the widespread discrimination women faced in all aspects of education, not just sport. The legislation came following the Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 which banned discrimination based on race, sex, national origin, and religion in employment, but did not include educational institutions (Ware, 3). Historically, "there has been a long-held belief in our culture that women who engage in vigorous physical activity or exercise run the risk of physically harming themselves" (Woodford in Dunleavy, 203). Conversely, female coaches between 1920 and 1960 "asserted that a young woman's future role as wife and mother was of far greater importance than any championship she may ever win through

competition” (Smith, xiv). This narrative directly inhibits any social progress women could achieve. But with the passage of Title IX and the women’s movement of 1970 accompanied with the second wave of feminism, women were actively making changes. Prior to the passing of Title IX fewer than 300,000 girls participated in highschool athletics, that number has since grown to over 3 million in 2011 (Buchanan, 91). Similarly, participation in college athletics improved significantly as the post-Title IX growth was around 170,000 athletes (Buchanan, 91). These are huge wins for women that have had a positive generational impact on the girls of the future along with major social and physical benefits for all women. One of the major takeaways from Title IX is the amount of opportunity women and girls gained in the area of sport. Additionally, as alluded to about the social impact of new legislation, Title IX’s wide popularity has since created more acceptance for female athletes within society. So, opportunity and acceptance have been two of the largest impacts of Title IX for female athletes.

Some impactful athletic triumphs post Title IX to name a few are in 1973, Billie Jean King defeats Bobby Riggs in a tennis match billed as the “Battle of the Sexes”. Or in the same year when the Association for Intercollegiate Athletics for Women awarded the first academic scholarships to women athletes at the collegiate level. In 1976, Janet Guthrie became the first female driver in the Indianapolis 500. In 1981, Kathy Whitworth became the first female golfer to win \$1 Million in earnings. In 1984, Joan Benoit won the first women’s olympic marathon. In 1989, Victoria Brucker became the first girl to play in the Little League World Series. In 1991, the first world cup championships were contested in the sport of soccer and the U.S. Team won the title. In 1996, the sports of soccer and softball made their olympic debut and the U.S. women won gold in basketball, gymnastics, soccer, softball, and synchronized swimming; and in 1998 women’s ice hockey debuted at the Winter Olympics and the U.S. won the gold medal (Cohen,

100 Years in Women's Sports). These outstanding feats from powerful female athletes would not have been possible without the passage of Title IX changing sports in society.

It is not to undermine the great athletic feats and accomplishments of women in history by debunking the idea that *Title IX guarantees full equity*, but it is worth noting that Title IX has not always proved to be helpful to women and female athletes, administrators, and coaches still feel discriminated against today in the world of sport.

### **Tribulations with Title IX**

Susan K. Cahn and Jean O'Reilly create an analysis of tailwinds and headwinds for women through a chronological examination of women in sports over 125 years. In addition to the many wins, there are some noted changes that are effectively losses, for example, in 1981 "The Association of Intercollegiate Athletics for Women (AIAW) ceases operations and the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) takes over college women's sports. The long-term effect of this change is a reduction in the number of women coaches and administrators." (Cahn and O'Reilly, p. 170). This shows how in an area where Title IX was used to create equality through instituting the same governing organization for collegiate athletics for both men and women, women were indirectly negatively impacted. Another setback occurred in 1984 when the Supreme Court weakened the law with the Grove City Decision. This supreme court ruling in *Grove City v. Bell* is "interpreted to mean that Title IX no longer covers sports" (Cohen, ix). Its power was not fully restored until 1988 with the passing of the Civil Rights Restoration Act --- which was actively opposed by both the National Athletic Association and President Regan (Smith, xv). In 2005, during the second Bush Administration, the Department of Education issued guidance that allowed schools to use an email survey sent to female students to evaluate the status of female sports. If response rates were low, then the

school did not have to make any changes or alter programs and the school was ultimately deemed Title IX compliant. This wasn't rescinded until President Obama's first term (Buchanan, 93). These stalemates in allowing the law come to full fruition and provide equitable experiences for women suggests that women have and continue to face systematic challenges in asserting their own position in sport.

Welch Suggs would elaborate on Cahn et al's analysis of the negative side effects of Title IX. The leading tragedy that Suggs exposes is the reality that college sports have become extremely commercialized for men at the expense of women. Gerald Gems would agree, "commercialization of the women's sport requires the women to compete with the men for media attention, spectators and revenue" (Gems, 294). In the world of sports, identifying athletes at a younger age, prioritizing private coaches and club teams, and overall stress on earning a spot on an NCAA team has unfortunately become the norm. These expectations lead to problems for female athletes that don't trouble male athletes as often, such as eating disorders, obesity, and damage to knee ligaments (Suggs, 177). Further, sports at their core have the ability to teach athletes valuable educational lessons both on and off the field. However, in college sports winning has superseded the educational benefits and colleges are sacrificing their academic standards to recruit better athletes to build a better reputation among "fans, alumni, state legislators, donors, and present and future students" (Suggs, p. 175). This actively dictates how Title IX impacts female athletes because it forces women to feel the same pressure as the men.

While Title IX is supposed to create equity in universities, Smith points out that many schools do not comply and argue for favoring male over female athletes. Common arguments are that football should be exempt from Title IX because it makes revenue for the school and that women deserve fewer opportunities because their sports are rarely revenue producing (Smith,

XV). Accomplished attorney and former athlete Nancy Hogshead Makar wrote a letter to the University of Florida college president pointing out the school's equity issues: "UF would need to provide \$1,397,433 [more] in scholarship aid for its female student-athletes to be equal with male student-athletes. Moreover, UF spent \$1,545,320 recruiting its male athletes, and just \$610,891 recruiting female athletes" (Elfman, 2020). This proves that at big, football forward schools, Title IX compliance lacks. However, Hogshead wants to make it clear that there have been serious improvements made for female college athletes and that the appreciation, love, and support for Title IX is greater than ever (Elfman, 2020). Suggs and Smith are perhaps more critical in their evaluation of Title IX being helpful and feel that the tragedy of Title IX could be the problems rooted within the men's system that are actively harming females (Suggs, p.187). Now, I fully understand and recognize that mens sports leagues such as college football (NCAA), the NFL, and NBA amount for a real difference in revenue based on ticket sales and viewing opportunities. However, in a society where sports are so obviously important to popular culture, why do women still face extensive struggles in gaining media attention and a fan base? I think this points to a larger problem in the systematic organization of sport and overarching societal gender expectations for women.

### **American Sport and Societal Gender Roles**

Why is sport so important to American's and so ingrained in our country's culture? And what even is the institution of sport? In American culture, sport is hegemonic, it can be used for physical participation, consumer enjoyment, socialization, economic gain, or just entertainment (Gems, 4). Sport has been prevalent in American culture pre-colonization through hunting, fishing, running, swimming or even organized with the Native Americans playing lacrosse (Gems, 37). It is embedded in our culture for the wide range of levels of participation, we must

look past the athlete and understand the secondary involvement roles such as coach, manager, official, or consumer to truly understand society's relationship and obsession with sport (Brown in Dunleavy, 123). Conversely, Gems articulates the importance of tavern's in sport culture and how they served as a destination for social gatherings, for consumers to view sport, for gamblers to bet on competition during the colonial period. The role of tavern culture in society pleased men for the social interaction and conspicuous consumption this led to the formation of sports clubs founded for gentlemen to actively participate in sport recreationally (Gems, 49). The role of the tavern represents the bar today and perhaps a sports club could mirror a fraternity. Ultimately, the production and consumption of sport was designed by men for men, actively preventing women from any sort of engagement. It is this patriarchal, historical formation of the institution of sport, which aggressively dominates American culture, that has continually oppressed women.

Gender is loosely defined as “a process of social construction, a system of social stratification, and an institution that structures every aspect of our lives...” (Gems, 11). As an institution that structures every aspect of our lives, gender is used as a way to order society and create a categorical system. This further allows for society to develop gender identities and perceptions of how gender is supposed to be played out. We can use Erving Goffman's theory of the Presentation of Self in Everyday Life to understand gender as a performance that individuals in society do everyday. Perhaps the fatal flaw in Title IX is simply the existence of expected societal gender roles and assigned gendered behaviors/character traits. Feminist theory can be used to explain some of the systematic struggles women face in sport. Feminist theory suggests that sports are gendered activities because the knowledge is grounded in the values and experiences of men which results in society celebrating attributes associated with dominant

forms of masculinity in athletics (The McGraw-Hill Company, 2012, p.39). Further, “gender roles, myths, and relations are rooted in the idea of male strength and female weakness” (Gems, 251). Therefore, celebrated qualities in sport that are associated with masculinity are toughness and aggressiveness whereas qualities associated with femininity such as emotion and beauty are not valued in sport. These socially constructed, patriarchal conceptions of gender expectations for the female and masculine are harmful for the success of women on the athletic field. Relying back on Goffman’s theory, sport can be looked at as a stage and in sport the body plays a decisive role for its physical strength, power, and endurance. Therefore, the stage of sport is a place where bodily differences and gender differences are constantly produced and reproduced (Gems, 11). Mary Jo Kane would agree with Gerald Gems about the presentation of the body as she says “sport is ultimately physical, it provides an arena for producing concrete, everyday examples of male physicality, muscularity, and superiority” (Kane, 96). This leads to active comparison of the sexes based upon bodily differences.

Historically, women’s competition has been suppressed according to gendered expectations. In the 1920’s, the Women’s Division of the National Amateur Athletic Federation stated that “competition would harm the nervous system, encourage rowdiness, and lead to injury and exploitation” (Smith, p. XIV). This harmful statement suppresses a woman’s voice and actions by suggesting that rowdiness is negative. Even earlier it was said that “professionalism and athleticism for women presented negative perceptions because it violated two principles: women should not participate in competitions and women should stay at home rather than pursue a profession (Gems, 267). The male dominance in sport is unbreakable and its historical tenure is what has influenced the opportunities available to women. The United States has a history of systematic subordination of the woman in society. In the 1800’s wives were essentially owned

by their husbands and married women were not allowed to possess their own property until the Married Women's Property Act of 1848 (Gems, 252). American society struggles with accepting females into sport because of the new definition regarding female athleticism and the traditional perception of athletics in our society (Kane, 98). Some have even viewed sports women as an assault on sport, rather than a progression in the area (Kane, 99).

In the institution of sport in America, a patriarchal society maintains and perpetuates (Duquin in Dunleavy, 167). Sport is often said to be an institution of sportsmanship and fair play, however most sociologists argue that sport has a dominant value of winning (Theberge in Dunleavy, 285). Perhaps it is this underlying value of winning in the institution of sport that has created a subordination of women in the game. Combined with societal gender roles structured through historically created gendered expectations and the influence of the patriarchy, women have been left behind and still today continue to face inequity in the form of wage gaps, participation opportunities, media representation, and consumption. In America, America's game is generally regarded as football. This quote from respected football coach and legend Vince Lombardi may summarize the institutionalized problem with values in sport, "winning isn't everything, it's the only thing" (Theberge in Dunleavy, 285).

A big pillar of the American sport culture is college sports. In this country, we have taken the intercollegiate athlete and commercialized the game to the point where some athletes become superstars, without receiving payment, an issue for an entirely different thesis. How are women affected by college athletics? College sports began in 1852 with the first competition being a rowing match between Harvard and Yale (Gems, 44). On the other hand, intercollegiate championships for women began in the 1960's under the AIAW --the aforementioned, gender specific, Association for Intercollegiate Athletics (Gems, 289). The league is confusing because

on the one hand it was founded on ideological gendered differences but it did employ many women giving women positions of power within sport. Ultimately, after Title IX the league merged with the NCAA to create more equity which indirectly harmed women as women lost powerful roles in sport. Women dominate the total population of this country and “as of 2008, female students made up 57% of the student body in colleges; but women’s teams were awarded only about  $\frac{1}{3}$  of the athletic budget” and “more than 57% of women’s teams are coached by men” (Gems, 290). Additionally, although the understanding is that Title IX prevents discrimination based upon sex in federally funded athletic programs, Title IX actually does not require schools to provide the same level of facilities and equipment to male and female teams (Buchanan, 93). These real statistics demonstrate the unbroken male dominance in sport. Men still hold the lever of power in sport not only at the collegiate level, but also the professional level and there seems to be no change in sight.

Sports have freed women just as feminism is about supporting individual and collective liberty to make decisions. It is the female athletes, who utilize the advancements from Title IX to make a statement on gendered norms by breaking through societal barriers, that have created such a synonymous association between equity in athletics and Title IX. Henry Webb believed that sport is a major training ground for the working world (Theberge in Dunleavy, 285). Evidence supporting this tells us that “career opportunities improve for former athletes as well. Studies demonstrate that executive business women overwhelmingly participated in sports growing up, and that sports participation for girls leads to an increase in the labor force” (Buchanan, 92). It is challenging for women to disrupt gendered norms as they constantly face social pressures to act a certain way. However, without these powerful female athletes change could not have happened. Athletics are valuable to women not only for career opportunities but

also for various health benefits. Change needs to continue to happen so women can further be freed by sport. In American sport culture we need to stop using terms like the lady so-and-so's and the something-ettes to make female athletics accepted in society. After nearly 50 years of Title IX and countless more women participating in sport it is time for society to throw away historically constructed gender expectations and allow women to be strong and powerful.

### **Media Representation**

In today's society, the mass media plays a large role in actively shaping a story to fit a certain context which ultimately influences the minds, opinions, and values of the American people. In the 1920's the media started promoting athletes as heroes (Gems, 57). This led to sport becoming increasingly popular among youth and consequently in school culture. Further, television brought greater rise to the national sporting culture in the 1950's, fans were able to watch pros, changing the narrative from supporting local teams to professional teams (Gems, 57). Now, sports are an entertainment business feeding the american's appetite. Conversely, today, media outlets give a disproportionate amount of coverage to sport which helps to perpetuate the American's interest in organized athletics (Kane, 100). The media actively pushes dominant values and ideologies excluding those of marginalized populations, for sport dominance is centered around traditional conceptions of gender. It is ultimately the role of the media outlets to make money by pleasing viewers, so in the idea of "preferred readings", the producers of the media believe that the consumer will accept or favorably view certain presented messages (Kane, 101). Two major differences concerning the media representation of the female and male athletes are that "sports women have been grossly underrepresented in terms of overall coverage" and that "males are presented in ways emphasizing strength and competence whereas females are highlighted for their physical attractiveness and femininity" (Kane, 102).

In early studies of Sport Illustrated content, a leading sporting magazine, it was found in 1991 that men accounted for almost 91% of the total sports coverage (Kane, 103). Cheryl Cooky finds that coverage has remained remarkably inequitable in a 2013 study. Cooky analyzes this in her article “*Women play sport, but not on TV*” -- the title alone exposes the idea that regardless of Title IX women still struggle to feel equity in sports. In a six-week study, Cooky observed that the “coverage of women’s sport is the lowest ever” (Cooky et al, 2013). Her study was conducted by following local media outlets in Los Angeles and the Global media supergiant ESPN’s *sportscenter*. She argues that “the amount of coverage of women’s sports and the quality of that coverage illustrates the ways in which the news media build audiences for men’s sport while silencing and marginalizing women’s sport” (Cooky et al, 2013). . It is visually evident to anyone in the United States that men’s sports receive more media attention than women’s sports. As a general trend in the United States, I am aware of the ways in which the media has the ability to create a biased narrative that they project to a wide population of people impacting and forming their personal opinions. The lack of media coverage for women in sport certainly impacts women’s ability to gain equal pay among other things men have that women don’t in athletics. So just as Title IX has made changes to allow women to compete in intercollegiate athletics, attend the olympics, and earn professional status, society needs to also make changes to allow women to achieve equality in all functions of sport. Early on Eleanor Metheny identified the idea of “sex-appropriate sports”, such sports that emphasizes gracefulness and were aesthetically pleasing such as figure skating and gymnastics (Kane, 106). In a later study, Kane found that sex-appropriate sports were given significantly more coverage; “by their symbolic annihilation of the female athlete, the media tells us that sportswomen have little, if any, value in this society, particularly in relation to male athletes” (Kane, 107). In 2018 a study was conducted

using tweets on Twitter to compare American soccer dialogues between the men's and women's national teams during their respective World Cup tournaments. In the examination of 33,529 tweets, Lauren M Burch et al found that "the Women's team was more likely to receive personal and physical characterizations" in the contents of the tweets (Burch, 1). To be duly noted about gender relations in regards to soccer, "the dataset for the FIFA Women's World Cup more than doubled the number of tweets for U.S. games a year prior" (Burch, 20). This can certainly be explained by the fact that the women played more games than the men but also speaks volume of the growing popularity of women's soccer due to their eminent success.

Cooky again, along with Nicole Lavoie, analyzed media representations of female athletes through a sociological lens. Televised broadcast of female sports has made progress, shown through the ESPN study; however, even though they are on TV it is substantially less. Additionally, as some television improvements have been made Cooky notes that this is not translated into coverage from newspapers, magazines, or highlight shows (Cooky and Lavoie, 2012). Further the most problematic issue is that generally the media coverage female athletes do have is over sexualized. Sociologist Mary Jo Kane establishes that magazines such as the Sports Illustrated swimsuit edition are harmful for athletes because the images "sell sex" and fail to legitimize women's professional sports (Cooky and Lavoie, 2012). In studying the larger institution of sports it is evident that women lack positions of power in sports media. In fact, since Title IX women holding administrative positions in sport have declined from 90% to 40% (Cooky and Lavoie, 2012). This legitimizes a point made by Cahn and O'Reilly on the negative side effect of Title IX when the NCAA took over governing women's collegiate athletics. Smith emphasizes Cooky's point by noting that less than 10 percent of all sportswriters are women; so, even when the media does report on female athletes it is usually through a men's eyes (Smith,

xix). It is overly evident that we need more women in power to combat that issue of low levels of media representation and hypersexualization. Ultimately, duly noted, this points at the persistence of sexism and male dominance in the larger organization of sport in America (Cooky and Lavoie, 2012).

The sexualization of the female athlete as represented in the media aggressively denies the woman any power she may achieve through sport (Kane, 108). As a trend, Kane found that media about female athletes generally focused on their behavioral characteristics in regards to their personal lives and femininity rather than hard work and discipline as a gifted athlete. She notes the two distinct features to evaluate in media that is hypersexualized, visual images and the language. The photos of female athletes often represent dominant stereotypic ideologies.

Virginia Leath and Andrea Lumpkin found that “almost 60% of the athletes featured in the magazine were shown in posed shots rather than actively participating in their respective sports” (Kane, 109). Conversely, Gems noted that one of the most harmful media outlets is the Sports Illustrated Swimsuit edition, portraying the female as a sexual object not an athlete. (Gems, 294).

This matches Kane’s overarching point of the women being portrayed as a lady first and an athlete second (Kane, 108). Unfortunately, some see this as the only way to make female sport visible (Gems, 294). What does this say about the status of our society and our cultural values? Do women need to be used as sexual objects for male pleasure in order to gain some sort of recognition? It is time to celebrate the female for athletic achievements, physical, and mental strength. In the language of the media, Kane observes patterns of gendered language. Often, adult women are still referred to as “girls” whereas men are rarely referred to as boys, this gendered language helps maintain the secondary status of women. Further, gendering women’s athletic events such as the ‘Women’s World Cup’ versus the ‘World Cup’ for the men leaves the

women out to be the other and reinforced male sports as the norm (Kane, 111). Additionally, the hierarchy of naming delegitimizes the credit female athletes get. In a 1989 study of the women's and men's NCAA final four basketball tournament it was found that the women were referred to by their first name 53% of the time whereas the men only 8% (Kane, 112).

A docu series produced by ESPN, "nine for IX", highlights female athletes' experiences with gender expectations in sports. In an episode titled *Branded*, successful female athletes are interviewed on their brands, endorsements, and marketing potential compared to male athletes (Lobpries et al, 2018). Lobpries et al use Social Role Theory to analyze the interviews with elite female athletes to discover what barriers they face when establishing their own personal brands. For female athletes, "social roles include the appropriateness for behaviors associated with being a woman and being an athlete" (Lobpries et al, 2018). Suggesting that there are gender-based barriers women face regularly because of the way they are socially expected to act. In sport, female athletes who don't follow typical hyper-female behavior risk facing mass scrutiny from the media. This was particularly evident when Brandi Chastain won the 1999 World Cup for the US Women's National Soccer team. In an exhilarating win, Chastain celebrated by ripping her jersey off, sliding across the field, and outwardly celebrating a landmark victory. Now, if she were a male her celebration would never be talked about. However, due to expected social roles Chastain faced brutal retaliation from the media summarized in a New York Times article titled "The Sports Bra Seen Round the World" (nytimes.com, 2003). Why was it about her Bra? Why wasn't it about her confidence, celebration, a team win, or her powerful body? This is because society hypersexualizes the female body and in sport this consequently affects female athleticism. Ultimately, Chastain created a breakthrough for women that Title IX could not achieve. By taking the brunt of media criticism, she proved to young girls that outward

expression of celebration is okay and paved the way for girls to continue challenging societal gender norms.

The findings from Lobpries et al's study resonate directly with the explanation for the way Chastain's celebration was viewed. The themes identified as barriers for women in why they struggle to establish personal brand are: being bold and assertive, assuming attractiveness matters, performance and something else, invisible and lacking, and proper brand management (Lobpries et al, 2018). Lobpries notes that "intense celebrations or aggressive personalities are not purported to be feminine communal behaviors" thus, women who act this way could potentially risk hurting their personal brand (Lobpries et al, 2018). Exposing why women struggle being bold and assertive. The athletes interviewed also revealed that "physical attractiveness remains primary for women to be marketable or to build their brand" (Lobpries et al, 2018). Historically, women are prejudged based upon their exterior which is harmful to a female athlete because it hinders her ability to believe her athletic skill is valuable. I can imagine this is how Chastain felt, criticized for celebrating a major victory and then she's only remembered for her damn bra. As a concluding factor, all of the female athletes determined that they are less likely to forge a unique personal brand because ultimately, men can survive solely on their playing salaries whereas women depend on brand and marketing deals. (Lobpries et al, 2018). Thus, women end up succumbing to the cookie-cutter, gender based expectation that will please the media allowing them to have a monetarily successful career.

The harmful narratives that the mass media produce as a result of their position focusing more on their monetary outcome versus purely sports reporting harms the legitimacy of the female athletes. Allowing sports women to be portrayed as fundamentally different from their male counterparts allows male superiority and female inferiority to reflect, construct, and

perpetuate (Kane, 100). Changing the media narrative, including women, and staying away from sexualized images will help female athletes earn more respect and acceptance in American society.

### **The USWNT and the Struggle for Equal Pay**

A continued struggle for women in the working world is the fight for equal pay. That fight does not only exist in the office but also on the playing field -- proving another myth of Title IX. As noted, brand deals are important for athletes to make money, but for men they can have a successful career without brand deals. For professional female athletes they would need another job if it weren't for brand deals. The most active case in the fight for pay equity currently involves the US Women's National Soccer Team. In 2019, the team jointly filed a gender discrimination lawsuit against their employer US Soccer for unequal pay compared to their male counterparts. A few key things to note in this case that differ from the NBA VS. WNBA and college football VS. any women's collegiate team is that the USWNT is more accomplished than the USMNT (Hussain, Jawahar, and Stone, 2020). In 2015, the women's World Cup final became the most watched soccer in American television history. In comparison to the 2018 men's World Cup, in the United States, viewership was 22% higher for the 2019 women's World Cup (Hussain et al, 2020). Further, they are three time World Cup champions and four time Olympic Gold Medalists, signifying the uniqueness of the case because the women are award winning, have a large fan base, and generate revenue in comparison to their male counterparts (Hussain et al, 2020).

Women's soccer has adopted the #EqualPayEqualPlay hashtag since their lawsuit which is still unresolved. What the women are aiming to prove is that pay inequality is institutionalized and perpetuated as a result of industry standards (Hussain et al, 2020). The men's and women's

teams under the USSF (United States Soccer Federation) have two very different pay structures.

Despite differences in pay structures a few key disparities are worth noting (Hussain et al, 2020):

1. Head coach of USWNT salary in 2017: \$291,029 vs. head coach of USMNT salary in 2017: \$1,249, 348
  - a. To be noted that the men's coach has the greatest record of wins in U.S. history, however, the difference in pay is still massive
2. MLS 2019 minimum salary: \$60,000 (no maximum) vs. NWSL 2019 salary: \$46,200 (maximum) and \$16,538 (minimum)
  - a. The woman's minimum is just above the federal poverty line
3. Different World Cup roster bonuses
  - a. LUNA Bar donated \$718,750 to account for the pay gap
4. If the women and men won the same amount of games the women would earn only 38% of the compensation the men would get
5. From 2016 to 2018 the women's team generated more revenue than the men's team

These staggering figures allude to to some sort of pay discrimination and if it is not based on gender, I'd be curious to understand what the outlier is. Hussain further points at a strong international influence from FIFA who indirectly affects USSF by acting as a governing body and setting a precedent for every other organization. As the USWNT and other females alike have faced years and years of gender and wage inequality the question is when and how can the wage gap be closed and the USSF make it equitable for the women's team? Early this September (2020), another two female soccer powerhouses, England and Brazil confirmed equal pay for their men's and women's teams. In England, they announced that both the men's and women's national teams are being paid the same appearance fee to represent their country, this extends to equality in match fees and match bonuses (Reuters.com, 2020). In Brazil, the Brazilian Football Federation announced that they will pay their women the same as their male counterparts. This means every player representing Brazil will receive equal daily rates and prize money. Both Brazil and England join Australia, Norway, and New Zealand in their pay equity efforts (CNN.com, 2020).

Due to the women's success rates and ability to outsell the men's team I can't understand why U.S. soccer can't find some moral ground to pay the women the money they deserve. I can't even imagine the frustration of being a member of the US Women's National team, doing your job to the best of your ability, succeeding nationally and internationally, and outperforming your male counterpart yet still being paid less. It is a slap in the face and regression in terms of the progression of women in this country. Women have come a long way since being owned by their husbands, they have fought for the right to vote, fought to be educated, fought for different roles in society, fought to play sports, and continue to fight to be paid equally.

### **Conclusion**

Title IX, although not descriptively set out to impact athletics has been the backbone of many arguments about the differences between men's and women's sports. It is a common misconception that Title IX solved all the problems women have faced in sport. Now, although it has provided for many amazing "firsts" for female athletes it has not created full equality. Women are continuing to fight for equality in sport whether it be monetary based, playing conditions, gear, or media coverage. Why if sports are so important to popular culture in America and if Title IX is supposed to guarantee that "no person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits from... [any] activity receiving Federal financial assistance" do women continue to struggle in equitable experiences?

So, why aren't we there yet? In the year 2020 we are 49 years post Title IX. That means 49 years for the piece of legislation to be implemented and 49 years to work towards equal opportunity. 2020 is no doubt a strange athletic year due to the COVID-19 pandemic limiting participation opportunities for everybody. However, regardless of that, why are women still

consistently paid less? And in the United States Women's National Team's case, why when they do their job physically better producing real results are they not paid accordingly? And why in a society where sport is so embedded in our culture are women's athletics still not celebrated the same way men's are? Chapter 2 outlines the methods used in order to answer the general question focusing on United States soccer: why when the women are statistically inferior is their sport still viewed as inferior?

## **Chapter 2: Methods**

### **The Method**

The purpose of this research is to expand upon understanding societal gender differences through the lense of sport. Historically, in American society, women have been left behind and have had to work twice as hard to earn the rights given to men. Whether it be fighting to be in the classroom, being granted the right to vote, or actively seeking equal pay, women have fought for basic rights that society has granted men. Sport is ingrained in American culture as it acts to unite individuals who root for the same outcome, provide entertainment, and serve as the main mode for healthy, active movement for the human body, among others. So, if sport is so important to American culture why do female athletes still struggle to garner the same respect and recognition for their ability to compete? This research is important for that very question.

The literature review in chapter one provides for an in depth analysis of female athletics and athletes in a post Title IX era. The United States Women's National Soccer Team acts as a case study into the inequity female athletes continue to experience. To further understand the disparities between men's and women's athletics I have used the collegiate athlete experience. In both hearing from college officials and female student athletes I am able to create a greater picture of collegiate athletics and the female athlete experience.

The methodology I have chosen to build the narrative for equity in collegiate athletics is, interviewing college officials who work in athletics and Title IX and surveying female collegiate soccer players.

### **Description of the Interviews**

I chose to interview three female college officials who work within athletics and Title IX, making my sample size three. By choosing these three officials, all in different age ranges, I am able to understand, from a first hand experience, how universities work with Title IX to create better experiences for women. All three interviews were conducted via Zoom meetings and lasted about forty-five minutes each. Questions were tailored based on my research and the personal experience of every subject. Further, I conducted these interviews before surveying college athletes in order to frame certain questions to create a better survey.

The first subject interviewed whom I will call, Subject A, is a Title IX coordinator at a private college. Subject A simplified the description of her role in the statement “stop, prevent, remedy”, expanding to mean “stop discrimination that has occurred, prevent recurrence of discrimination and remedy it” (Subject A, 2021). At my institution, Union College, the Title IX policy details the college’s procedures to “ensur[e] that students and employees are protected against unlawful acts of sexual violence, sexual harassment, sexual exploitation, domestic violence, dating violence, stalking, and other forms of gender-based discrimination” (Union.edu, 2021). The second subject interviewed, whom I will call, Subject B, is an Associate Director of Athletics at a private college. Subject B has twelve years of experience in this role where she enjoys “watching the development of athletes over the years and [watching] coaches take pride in that development” (Subject B, 2021). Working in athletics she oversees marketing and promotions, as well as fund development for the department of athletics, while making sure coaches and athletes alike have the opportunities and resources they need for success. The third and final subject, whom I will call Subject C, is a Senior Associate Director of Athletics at a private college. With thirty years of experience as an official in Athletics, she has worn many

hats in her tenure. Subject C is a compliance coordinator where she implements the three prong test to ensure compliance with Title IX policy. She oversees the sports services department, is a Title IX Deputy Coordinator, and has been head coach of three collegiate teams. With this much experience and knowledge, subject C strives to be a role model for athletes. From these three women I was able to learn more about collegiate athletics from their perspective as college officials further helping to understand equity in sports.

### **Description of the Survey**

To complete the narrative of understanding equity in collegiate athletics I chose to survey female college soccer players. By surveying female athletes all within the same sport I created a homogeneous cohort of individuals whose experiences as collegiate athletes are linked by the commonality of the sport of soccer. The survey was sent to individuals representing eleven different institutions. Each initial person who received the survey was encouraged to pass the survey along to their respective team. Among the eleven institutions there was a range of teams who compete in NCAA Division 1, Division 2, and Division 3 leagues, as well as institutions that were both public and private. By incorporating multiple divisions and different types of institutions I hoped to create a broader understanding of inequity a woman may feel as a collegiate soccer player. Questions were asked about the individuals relationship with their respective Title IX coordinator, a question prompted from my interview with Subject A, where she informed me that an institution's Title IX Coordinator does not need to be a full time role and many students are often unaware of who their coordinator is. Further questions asked the athletes if they have experienced issues of inequity, if they feel their respective program is treated equally to the men's program at their institution, and to provide examples of improvement that could be made both at the collegiate level and outside of college sports for women in athletics.

### **Methods Overview**

By combining both the qualitative and quantitative data collected from the interviews and survey results I hope to understand equity at the collegiate level from both the official and student perspective. The data collected will further my research into the disparities women still face today in regards to sport and also continue the conversation for further progress to be made in the future.

## **Chapter 3: Results**

### **From the Official**

Why is it significant to talk to high ranking officials who work within the scope of athletics at the collegiate level? To help round out the understanding of equity for women in sports. This thesis research provides additional research into the disparities between men's and women's athletics in the United States at the collegiate level.

### **Title IX from the Eyes of the Coordinator**

Title IX, as highlighted, is a piece of legislation that has been largely associated with sports and widely understood to be the point of equality for women in athletics. I challenged Subject A to give me her own definition of Title IX. She said "Title IX is the federal law that is *intended* to prevent the discrimination based upon sex" (Subject A, 2021). The word "intended" here stood out to me as it aligns with much of my research in Chapter 1. As aforementioned, the length of Title IX is short, Subject A touched on this by emphasizing that although it is short, the law touches a huge population and applies to every student and employee at a higher education institution. Subject A's biggest challenge in her role is that Title IX coordinators are "not given clear instruction as to how to effectuate the language of the law ... [we] are given the expected outcomes, but no directions" (Subject A, 2021). Perhaps this is the biggest flaw in Title IX in inhibiting women to enjoy complete equality in athletics. Rather it is not the people involved in carrying out the policy but rather the policy itself giving no direction to the people who want the best for all athletes. Subject A further says that this is the "biggest misconception... people think there are instructions and we're choosing not to follow the manual" (Subject A, 2021). In reality, it is Title IX coordinators at institutions that are charged with writing policies and making up an instruction manual as best as possible. This, to me, is one of the most profound results in

understanding equity for athletics. I think it is human nature to quickly blame the person in charge or the “face” of the problem. This eye-opening understanding of Title IX from an individual who wants to please everyone, reveals that feasibly it is time to look at the overarching umbrella and blame the legislation of Title IX and not the people doing their best to effectuate the law.

Subject A taught me a few things about Title IX that I did not know. I think it is important to understand that I was born in 1999 and began attending college in 2016. In my experience as an athlete, equal opportunity in sports has not been something I have been surprised by but rather an expectation. Until 2011, institutions were not required to have a Title IX coordinator (Subject A). I think this late requirement is why institutions today still do not seem to have a “manual” on how to effectively effectuate Title IX along with not having a sample office structure. Title IX was written to mimic Title VII; which is a federal law protecting employees from discrimination in the work place. So, “where Title VII goes, Title IX follows” , this may be a better way to understand how Title IX continues to evolve and how it impacts institutions. Subject A and Subject B highlighted a generational shift in understanding Title IX from association with athletics to now, Generation Z associating it with sexual harassment. This could be because it wasn’t until the Clinton Administration that sexual harassment was recognized as discrimination (Subject A). A shocking thing to fully understand as someone who has only been a student and employee post that time period. It is unbelievable that the federal government would almost allow sexual harassment to happen in the work place. I hope the United States Women’s National Team’s public fight for equal pay will have a trickle down effect into all aspects of sport where one day it will be unbelievable that female athletes were paid disproportionately to male athletes.

In understanding how Title IX intersects with athletics at both public and private institutions only grows the complicated and challenging law. Institutions are given regulatory guidance that is the closest thing to an instruction manual; it changes often, -- in fact, each presidential administration has its own guidance. The ways in which it is seen and effectuated at every institution is entirely different; funding, culture, endowment, and institution type all play a role into that difference. Schools are actually not mandated to have any specific staff structure for Title IX other than a Title IX coordinator -- which is not required to be a full time position. At Subject A's institution, they have a Title IX committee exclusively within the athletic department that meets monthly to talk about any changes and effectuate policy. The committee works through Title IX compliance relative to NCAA expectations using the three-pronged test. The three-pronged test "addresses the all-important issue of "access" to the education program that is intercollegiate or interscholastic athletics" -- it is a way for schools to "check" that they are in compliance with Title IX policy (Titleixspecialists.com, 2021). This is no different at any institution no matter the athletic division because Title IX is federal. Without an instruction manual I asked Subject A how a Title IX coordinator should best carry out their role? She said it is dependent a lot upon lawsuits within your own circuit court. Institutions look to other institutions for examples on office structure but also, look to see why they have been sued, what has worked and what hasn't. I learned that the area is highly litigated so often administrators make the best decisions they can and wait to see if they get sued. There is an Association for Title IX Administrators, however, it costs institutions thousands and with budget cuts memberships that are helpful for instruction and guidance may be cut out due to the substantial cost (Subject A, 2021).

Subject A overall described the position to be a mess and clearly outlined a need for change as she said “this is not how this job should be done” when referring to adjusting policy based upon other collegiate lawsuits. However, ultimately, in her experience the job is rewarding “when people feel supported, listened to, and get the resources they need” (Subject A, 2021). Subject A helped immensely in building the narrative to understand equity in athletics. The overarching takeaway and resulting understanding from this interview was that the legislation of Title IX is flexible and work needs to be done at a higher level to ensure a continued equitable experience for all.

### **Athletic Administrators**

Subject B and Subject C both work within athletics at their respective institutions. As a collegiate soccer player herself, Subject B reflected on her experience as an athlete. She “did not feel a tremendous difference between her experience and the men’s team’s experience” only noting that her college soccer coach was a part time employee while the men’s team’s coach was a full time employee; giving the men more access to their coach than she had (Subject B, 2021). However, she did mention that on the 40th anniversary of Title IX in 2012 she could feel the benefits of the movement. In her role as an official, she believes her department has an eye on equity and creates opportunities not “just to try to check the box ... [but] give opportunities to all our athletes because they deserve it” (Subject B, 2021). I think this mentality is important because it doesn’t make female athletes feel like their standing as an athlete is just ‘because of Title IX’, but rather because people believe in the athletic experience of the female athlete. Subject C stated something similar when she reflected on her department’s goals: “knowing you have a department that believes in equality ... sure there is still a lot to do, we need more female coaches, more diverse coaches ... but, knowing that the program is striving for that is important”

(Subject C, 2021). Subject C provided an instance in one way her department works to create equitable opportunities. That is, having unlimited roster numbers for women (in terms of participation) while male sports have set roster limits. She said “more often than not there are so many more male athletes that want to be a part of a team whether or not they will compete. While female athletes look for other things to do if they’re not starting or playing a lot” (Subject C). So, the idea behind giving women’s sports the opportunity to have unlimited roster numbers is one way to hopefully drive participation rates up, creating a better experience for female athletes. This observation of gendered trends from Subject C made me think about general societal gender roles and the notion that females are less likely to speak up in a classroom out of fear of being wrong when compared to their male counterparts. Relating to Subject C’s own department’s analysis on female participation, I think it is safe to conclude that societal gender roles are also played out in the realm of athletics.

Both individuals touched on funding and the need for understanding funding in understanding the narrative of equity in sports. I believe this is important because common complaints from athletes are often that football gets an unfair advantage via funding or teams feel ripped off by the quality of their team gear. Subject B said that every sport has different spending levels which can account for funding differences; for example “the sport men’s lacrosse requires more equipment than women’s lacrosse therefore their budget is larger” (Subject B, 2021). Correspondingly, Subject C finds that in her role she “tries to have coaches make sure they know that their students understand things in terms of equity” (Subject C, 2021). Meaning that, the budget doesn’t need to be the same but the equitable aspect should be getting the same quality of uniforms, same quality of coaching, and equitable practice times. Budget differences can exist based upon amounts of needed equipment or bus numbers. Rounding out

the topic, Subject C believes that “female and male athletes need to understand that if a certain team walks around with all kinds of gear that flash stores do exist” -- meaning, the team curated and purchased the gear with their own money. I think Subject C produces one of the key findings from my interviews with this statement. Coaches should be transparent with their teams to make the players aware of the teams budget and how it will impact their experience. By doing this, coaches could create less strife from athletes who feel they have been ripped off. Further, it is important to educate both the female and male athletes on budget differences and the reasoning behind those differences; again, so one team does not feel ripped off and another team does not feel superior to their peers.

To my advantage, both subjects had many years of experience within athletics which prompted questions about areas of inequity they have seen in the realm of sport for women. Subject B highlighted an instance of inequity she saw while attending a professional sports event. In 2015, Canada hosted the Women’s World Cup which made it a highly attended event by American’s -- the United States Women’s Soccer Team won the tournament. When arriving for kick-off, Subject B parked a couple miles away from the stadium and found there was no signage directing attendees to the game. Overall, the facilities were terrible, the event was given no attention, and there were almost no lines anywhere; she found it to be “insulting” (Subject B, 2021). The 2015 World Cup did spark controversy over the field conditions, the women played on turf. It may seem like artificial turf is the better option but actually real, well-maintained, grass is the best surface to play soccer on. A 2015, Sports Illustrated article titled “*Artificial Turf Controversy a Constant in Backdrop of Women's World Cup*” highlighted the issues surrounding the playing surface for a competition of the world’s most elite female soccer players. The article states that the debate is “a symptom of something much larger: the ongoing inequalities in

support for women's and men's soccer programs globally ... a very visible and inescapable reminder many ways in which institutional forces continue to hold back the development of the women's game" (Dubois, 2015). This institutional issue is one of the many ways women have felt inequities as athletes but also, notably here from Subject B's personal experience, a way in which supporters too notice the visible disrespect.

Subject C highlighted more personal areas of inequity she experienced through her tenure working in collegiate athletics. This perspective allows for understanding how athletics have changed and improved to create a better experience for women over the years. In the 1990's, she served as a head coach for a few women's teams and noted the most inequities before the 1997 compliance review. A personal struggle for her was trying to make sure that here athletes were getting the practice times and uniforms they needed and deserved. Furthermore, at her respective institution, all coaches who coached a female sport served as the coach of at least two teams while the men's sports teams each had their own coach. This meant that the coaches of the women's team could not devote enough time to their teams because they were being pulled in multiple directions. In 1995, the school started to infuse more money into the athletics department helping female athletes. The biggest change was to make sure that a head coach only coached one sport. As a result, the women's teams became more successful, coaches were able to concentrate on their teams and recruit more, and ultimately female athletes had a better experience. Moving forward, women's sports continued to explode and more and more talented athletes pursued collegiate athletics. Additionally, she noted another great change for women in athletics came with increasing the salaries of female coaches, paying the respective coach based on their responsibilities. She said during her tenure she used to hear comments about the male coaches getting paid more because "they had a family to raise". This is an important area of

change to highlight because that has nothing to do with the woman's quality as a coach.

Additionally, equal pay is a much larger, structural, issue that is grounded in women in work; in 2021, the gender pay gap in not only sports, but also, entertainment and other areas of work still needs improvement. Overall, Subject C provides a great narrative of change over the years with the end goal result of creating a better experience for the athlete. It is important to see change in order to understand progress.

### **From the Athlete**

Hearing from the collegiate athlete is the best way to understand equity in sports. The female collegiate athlete's personal experience while playing their respective sport is the best indicator to know if in 2021, Title IX is working to eliminate disparities in "any education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance". First, to understand the demographics of who was surveyed. As aforementioned the two constants in determining the surveyed subject were: the sport of soccer and the participation in a women's collegiate program.

Out of the eleven surveyed schools, below is a breakdown of the NCAA divisions in which the athletes play in.

What division does your collegiate soccer team compete in?

78 responses

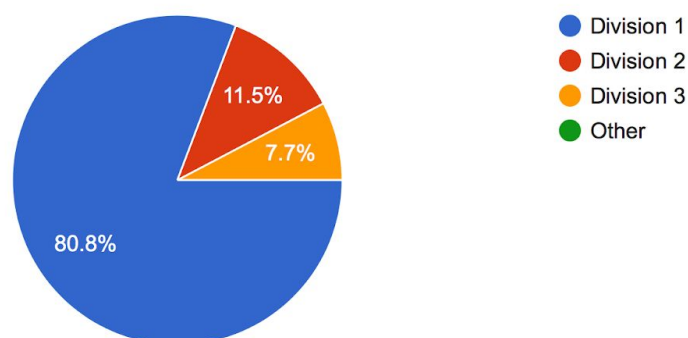


Figure 1: Collegiate Division

The majority of the participants in this survey participate in the NCAA Division 1, which is the highest, most competitive league for female collegiate soccer players to compete in.

The next pie chart represents the type of institution; public or private, in which each individual attends.

What type of institution do you attend?

78 responses

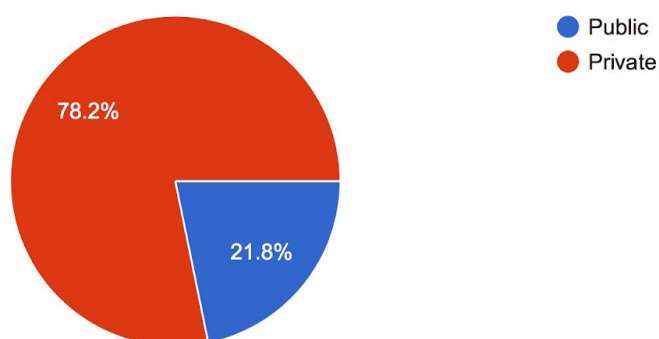


Figure 2: Institution Type

Figure 2 shows that 78.2% of the athletes attend private colleges or universities and 21.8% of the athletes attend public colleges or universities. Some key differences between institution types are: sources of funding, cost of attendance, availability of financial aid, religious affiliation, size, athletics & extra curriculars, diversity of student body, and prestige factor (Garnett, Edmit.png). Further, public schools are funded primarily by state governments whereas private colleges are supported by their own endowment and student tuition, which can account for public colleges and universities being less costly; however, private institutions offer more substantial tuition discounts. By law, public universities are secular whereas private colleges are not bound by this law and may be religiously affiliated. Public institutions are generally bigger which can account for more public schools offering Division 1 athletic programs. Finally, diversity differences occur where private colleges attract students from diverse geographic locations whereas public institutions attract more demographically diverse students; this can be attributed to lower tuition rates (Garnett, Edmit.png).

Next, class year was asked to be designated by each participant. Although I did not specifically look into it, I would assume underclassmen have different perceptions on equity than upperclassmen because of their length of participation in the athletic department thus far. Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic has halted many schools' athletic programs during 2020 and into 2021 so underclassmen may not have much experience in collegiate athletics at all. Below is the breakdown of respondents class years.

What class year are you?

78 responses

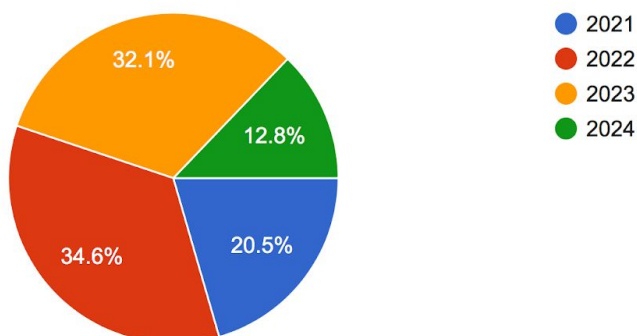


Figure 3: Class Year

Figure 3 shows that 20.5% of the respondents are in the class of 2021 or are seniors, 34.6% of respondents are in the class of 2022 or are juniors, 32.1% of respondents are in the class of 2023 or are sophomore, and 12.8% of respondents are in the class of 2024 or are freshman. The best indicator into participation rate based on class year is that none of the surveyed schools had a Fall 2020 soccer season and therefore freshman, or members of the class of 2024, have not competed at the collegiate level yet.

One takeaway from interviewing the college officials was that Subject A informed me about the professionalism of the Title IX coordinator position and how having someone who fills that role as a full time employee is not a requirement. This prompted me to ask the athletes about their relationship with their Title IX coordinator.

Do you know your school's Title IX coordinator?

78 responses

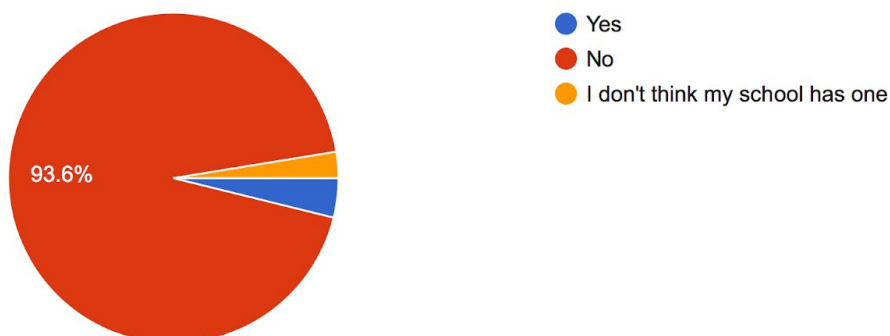


Figure 4: Title IX Coordinator

Figure 4 shows that 93.6% of respondents do not know their school's Title IX coordinator. Those who responded "Yes", said that their interaction with the coordinator is in some capacity of "lead[ing] a pre-season discussion on various NCAA compliance regulations including those involving Title IX" and "giv[ing] us a talk one a year about Title IX". I think this lack of involvement shows that perhaps athletic departments need to focus on creating better relationships between their athletes and Title IX coordinators. Perhaps, this could allow athletes to feel more comfortable communicating the issues of inequity they feel which will lead to less inequities in the future. As Subject A said, her role is to "stop, prevent, and remedy" discrimination.

Moving on, the surveyed athletes were asked questions about their experiences as an athlete regarding inequity. Questions here were prompted in a multiple choice, short answer, linear scale, and checkbox format.

As a collegiate athlete have you ever experienced issues of inequity?

78 responses

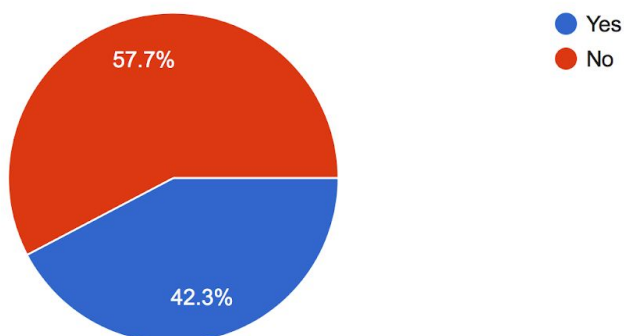


Figure 5: Inequity

Figure 5 displays that 42.3% of the respondents feel that they have experienced issues of inequity as a collegiate athlete and 57.7% of the respondents feel they have not. This shows that the majority of surveyed athletes have not experienced inequity; a very positive result. However, still, a great amount have -- a statistic worthy of further analysis. Following this question participants were asked, if comfortable, to provide an example of an inequity they have experienced whilst behind a collegiate athlete. One of the most common responses was regarding disproportionate media coverage on social media platforms from their schools in comparison to men's sports. I hypothesized this would be a common complaint as my previous research into how the media treats professional athletes also shows a grossly disproportionate lack of coverage. Another common trend was the feeling that the men's soccer team at the respondents respective school gets priority for field usage times as well as better and more gear. Practice times are one thing Subject C said her department works to make sure are equitable for all teams. In terms of how the team is viewed one respondent said "we (the women's team) are held to a much higher standard than the men's team". I thought this was interesting and potentially

reflective of societal gendered expectations. The notion that women should always act a certain way in order to maintain a good reputation. One respondent expressed issues of sexism, “comments about changing into our jersey at the game because our sports bras being seen was deemed as inappropriate, as the men’s team have gone around shirtless”. This feeling is very similar to how the media tends to hypersexualize female athletes. Also, when Brandi Chastain ripped off her jersey in celebration at the 1999 World Cup and received much slander afterwards for showing her sports bra at a game. I think this is reflective of society hypersexualizing the female body in various instances, not just sports media.

For the next set of questions respondents were asked to use the men’s soccer program as a point of comparison against their experience playing soccer at their respective school. Many respondents took this initiative instinctively when answering the previous question. Below is a linear scale representing respondents' feelings on equity compared to the men’s program at their school on a scale of 1-10.

For the next four questions please use the Men's soccer program at your institution as a point of comparison. On a scale of 1-10 how do you feel about the following (10 being entirely equal, 1 being entirely unequal).

78 responses

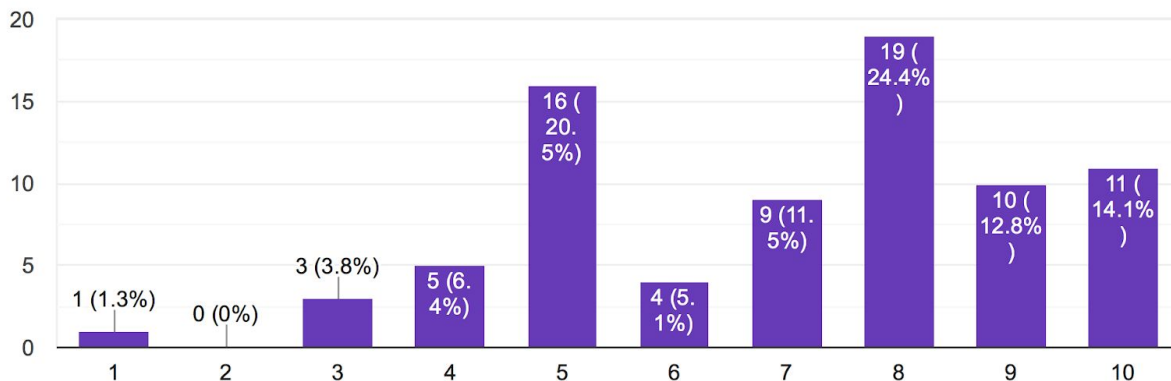


Figure 6: Equity Comparison

On this graph, 10 represents entirely equal and 1 represents entirely unequal. The graph shows that the majority of respondents feel that their respective soccer program is entirely equal to the men's program. This is a great overall result; however, 20.5% of respondents selected five on the scale which means there is room for improvement. Next, respondents that designated there were areas of inequity were asked to provide examples. The most common complaint was regarding practice times, this aligns with responses earlier when asked about general inequities within athletics. Players feel that the men's team gets better practice times and first priority to times. I think more transparency from the athletic directors who create the schedules would help with this issue. Another common complaint was regarding apparel, ranging from more or better gear. Again, media representation and general attitudes towards the team were reported as being disparate.

In general, in American society, men's sports are celebrated, respected, and supported at a much higher level than women's sports. I asked the athletes how attendance rates compare at their school between women's and men's soccer games.

How do attendance rates from your institution's community compare at home games?  
78 responses

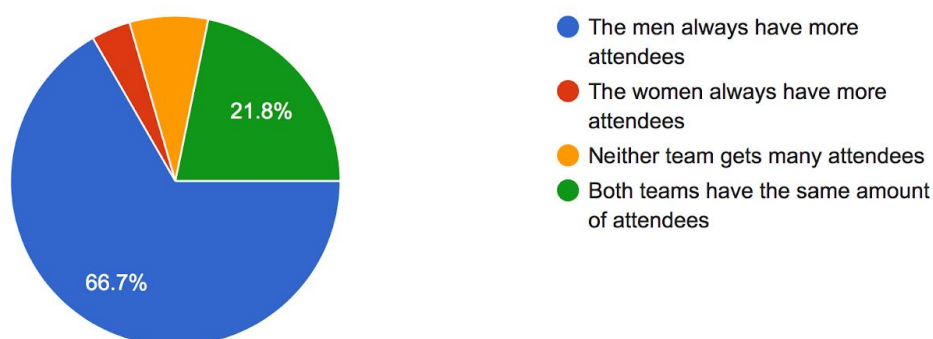


Figure 7: Attendance Rates

Figure 7 displays that 66.7% of respondents indicated that the men always have more attendees at their home games, while only 3.8% of respondents indicated that the women always have more attendees and 21.8% of respondents felt that both teams had the same amount of attendees. These reported attendance rates for collegiate athletics reflects the attendance rates of professional sports. This exposes institutionalized issues regarding women in sport and even greater women in work, struggling to attain the respect they deserve.

The issue grounded in women in work can be seen through the feminist lense to understand gender in its relation to power. Sport is a typically male dominated social space which hinders a female's ability to gain equitable recognition for their athletic accomplishments. A phrase commonly used in athletics is, "he plays like a girl", this phrase has a negative

connotation meaning that the ‘he’ who plays like a girl is playing poorly. I asked athletes how this phrase makes them feel.

When you hear the phrase “play like a girl”, how does that make you feel? (Select all that apply)

78 responses

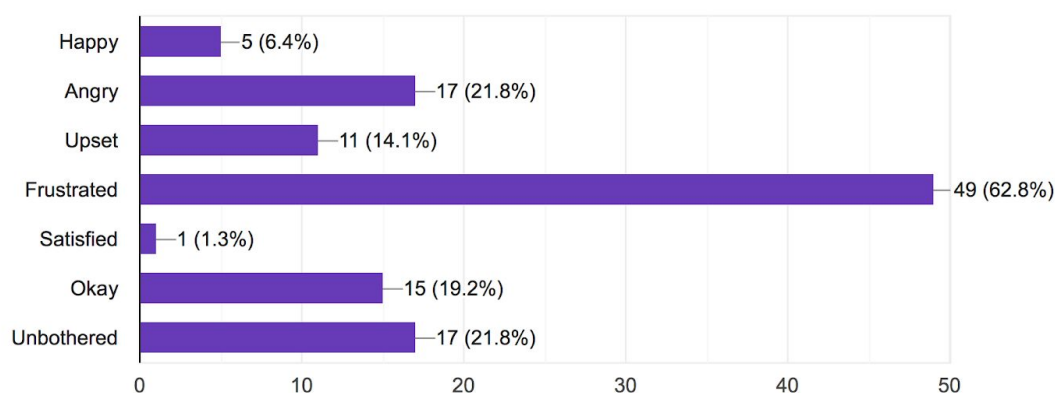


Figure 8: Play Like a Girl

Figure 8 shows that “Frustrated” is the most common feeling respondents have regarding this phrase. Below that, “Angry” and “Unbothered” tied for the second most popular feeling. I think this shows that the phrase still hits hard for female athletes today regardless of their athletic ability. I can imagine the phrase is entirely frustrating for an accomplished athlete such as the ones surveyed. To follow up on this feeling and to further evaluate the woman’s position in the area of sport I asked the athletes if they felt comfortable to achieve their full athletic potential. Meaning that, they don’t feel bound by the socially constructed gendered expectation for the female in reference to delicacy over toughness.

Socially constructed gendered expectations tend to impact the way humans act. Do you feel comfortable at your institution to achieve your full athletic potential?

78 responses

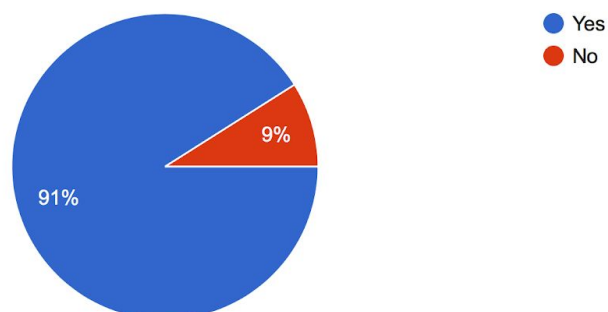


Figure 9: Comfort

On an extremely positive note, 91% of the respondents feel comfortable at their school to be the best athlete they can possibly be, as shown through figure 9 above. This is an uplifting statistic that suggests younger generations are growing as society is changing to accept female athletes and celebrate their successes at a greater rate.

Where to go from here? I asked the athletes to expand upon their feelings about their own athletic experience and offer suggestions for how the experience can be improved for women in athletics at the collegiate level.

Do you see any areas for improvement for women in athletics at the collegiate level?

78 responses

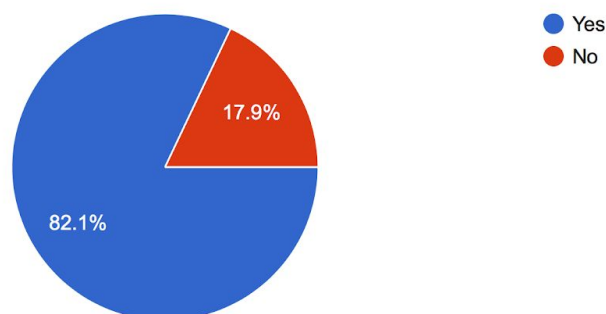


Figure 10: Collegiate Improvement

Figure 10 shows that 82.1% of respondents feel that there is room for improvement within the collegiate athletics space while 17.9% do not; suggesting that they have had an equitable experience and are satisfied as an athlete. Among those who responded “Yes”, one of the most common responses was regarding media coverage and promotion. This is a common theme seen throughout this survey which results in the fact that female collegiate athletes need more coverage and feel that it will help create a more equitable experience. One athlete said “more televised games and talk shows about women’s collegiate sports would be awesome”. So, not only does the media narrative need to be changed and institution’s need to promote female sports more, but also, more coverage in general needs to occur to support all athletes. This ties into another common theme where athletes expressed a desire for more support. Athletes asked for “continual encouragement”, “the same support and excitement”, and even “research on women in sports applied at the collegiate level”, all of these are rooted in helping one another and creating a better experience for all female athletes. Finally, one athlete said “I think the women’s game still has a way to go. Even though I think things are considerably equitable at my school, I would like to see closer to equal attendance at various sporting events and I think that starts with

women's training and ultimately advertisement". This quote and perspective is important because the athlete in reference feels that she has had a relatively equitable experience as a collegiate athlete; however, she still recognizes the need for improvement which perhaps points to the larger structural issues within women in sports or women in work in general.

Do you see any areas for improvement for women in athletics outside of college sports?  
78 responses

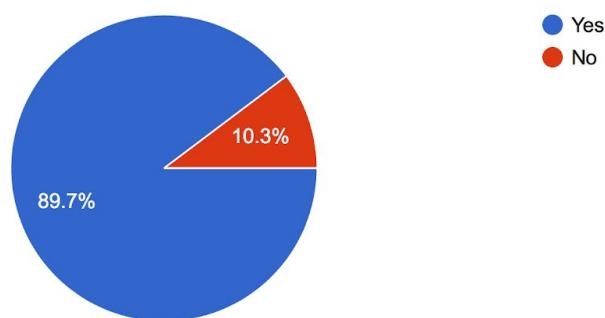


Figure 11: General Improvements

Figure 11 represents how the respondents feel regarding improving the circumstances for all female athletes. Here, 89.7% of respondents see areas for improvement, while only 10.3% do not. This growth from the previous question surrounding just collegiate athletes suggests that universities have come a long way in making the experience for female athletes equitable and feasibly, Title IX is doing its job. Among those who responded "Yes" here, the overwhelming majority stated that "Equal pay" was the largest issue facing women's sports. This correlates to the United State's Women's National Team's feeling resulting in a lawsuit in an effort to gain equal pay. Equal pay has proved to be one of the greatest hurdles for women in work to overcome. One athlete made a suggestion about coaching styles "boys and girls in sports are different (taking in information, motivations, constructive criticism) so coaching in the correct

way and understanding that not all girls are the same as well”. I find this answer to be important because it hints at a larger issue of women needing to be heard and listened to. Like this survey is attempting to accomplish for research purposes, females alike need to be heard and effectively listened to in order to be represented and create change. In further changing the social narrative, listening to women will ultimately “give girls the belief that their sport is equally as successful and meaningful to their male counterparts” -- this is a key way the narrative of women in sport changing can ultimately help the female athlete.

## **Chapter 4: Discussion and Conclusion**

### **The Current Conversations**

While working on this thesis, I noticed posts, tweets, and articles in my daily consumption of media that referenced gender equity in sports. Throughout the past couple of months, I saved some of these instances to highlight the conversations happening today.



Figure 12: Sue Bird vs. LeBron James

The above image from the Instagram account @shotclock\_media comparing the career statistics of WNBA star Sue Bird to NBA star LeBron James circulated the internet in 2020. The diagram shows that each athlete has played in their respective league for the same amount of time, won the same amount of championships but the pay difference is almost 200%.

While looking at LinkedIn, I found this post discussing the difference between Sue Bird and LeBron James' salary.

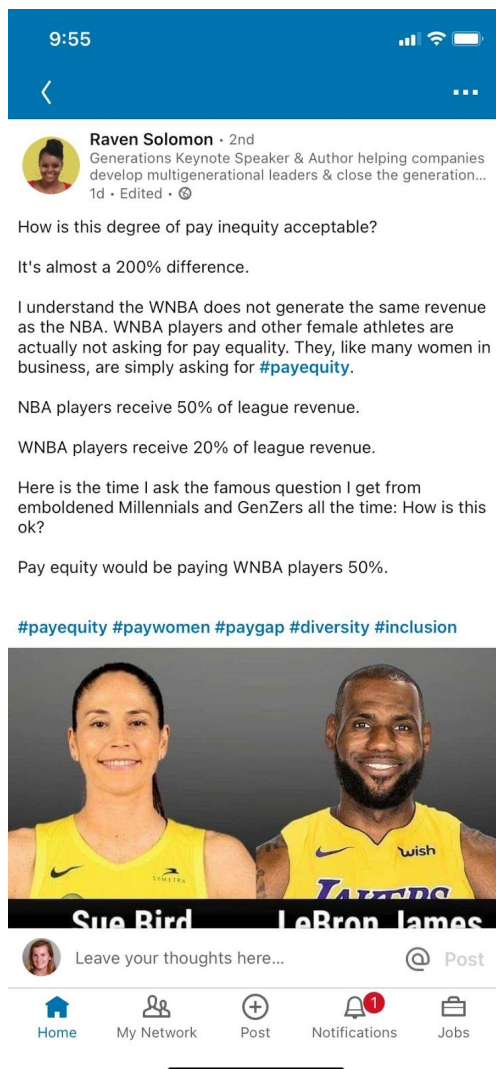


Figure 13: LinkedIn

Figure 13 shows how the narrative of pay equity is regularly talked about using the Sue Bird vs. LeBron James example as a point of reference. Here, the post clearly states that the athletes are asking for pay equity, not pay equality. Understandably, the NBA generates much more revenue than the WNBA so pay will not be monetarily equal; however, it needs to be equitable. Further, this post states that NBA players receive 50% of league revenue while WNBA players receive

only 20% of league revenue. This is an obviously inequitable situation that should be solved to better the experience for female athletes.

In November of 2020, Sarah Fuller a senior goalkeeper on the Vanderbilt Women's soccer team made history when she was called into action to become the kicker for the school's football team. The historical feat meant a lot for women; Sarah challenged boundaries and showed that women can participate in what is a "man's game." However, following her first appearance the backlash she received over social media was brutal.



Figure 14: Vanderbilt's Sarah Fuller

Figure 14 shows an Instagram post from @feministvoice showing some examples of the backlash Sarah Fuller received. Some highlighted comments are: “is it bad that I want her to get ROCKED ? I mean it’s only fair”, “but who cares”, “She’s gonna get slaughtered on a fire play”, and “They couldn’t have grabbed one from the guys team?”. All of these comments show what it is like to be a woman challenging societal norms and playing what is called a man’s sport. This takes away from the effect Fuller’s efforts should have created. She proved that gender equity in sports is making progress, that women can compete in a “man's sport”, and served as a role model for young athletes. However, the backlash discredits her efforts and displayed the existing, oppressive social ideology that women are not deserving of equal respect in athletics.

Media was a major recurring topic throughout this thesis. From the narrative perpetuated by media discrediting the athletic accomplishments of female athletes and hypersexualizing their bodies to collegiate athletes wanting equal promotion for their sports, the media played a large role in constructing and perpetuating the social climate.



Figure 15: Women's Sports on TV

Figure 15 is an Instagram post by @zkredhead of a tweet from @DrLindseyDarvin advocating for putting NCAA women's sporting events on TV. She states “there is a market, stop suppressing it” when referring to the grossly disproportionate lack of media coverage women’s collegiate sports get in comparison to their male counterparts. This shows that the conversation on more coverage is happening and shows that people are interested in watching games but the games just aren’t available to be watched.

As mentioned earlier, The United States Women’s National soccer team is publicly fighting for pay equity. While some countries such as Brazil, England, Norway, and Sweden

have closed the gender pay disparities for soccer, others, like the United States are still not able to achieve such a basic ask.

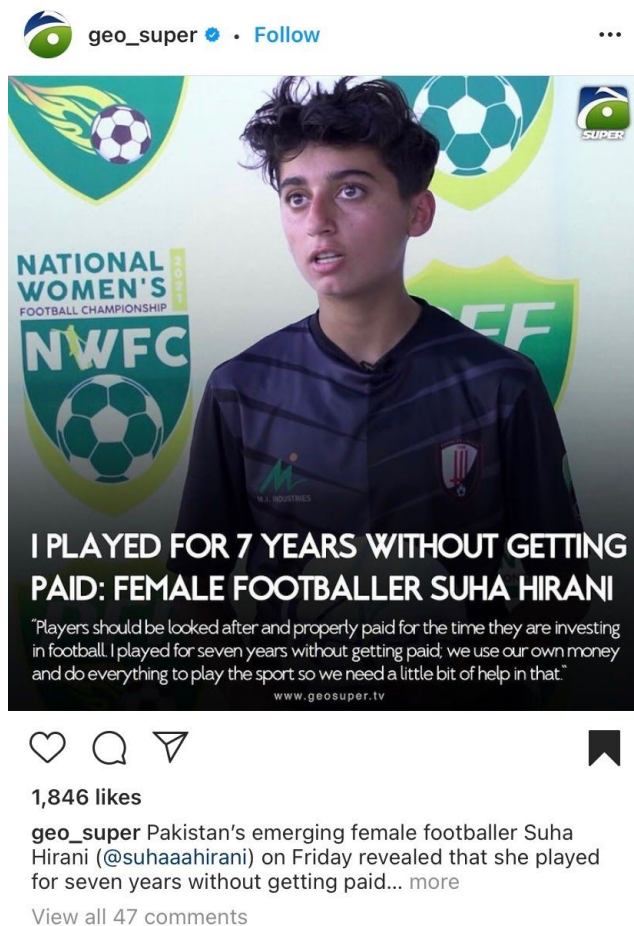


Figure 16: Pakistan's Suha Hirani

Figure 16 shows an Instagram post from @geo\_super which states that a Pakistan female soccer player (footballer), Suha Hirani, played for seven years without getting paid. This is a frustrating and very sad reality of how women are treated in other countries. Hirani further states that “we use our own money and do everything to play the sport, so we need a little bit of help in that”. This shows that disparities exist outside of the United States and gender pay equity rooted in women in work is a much larger, global issue particularly grounded in gendered stereotypes that are continually perpetuated in society.

In hockey, the Lamoureux twins of the United States made a name for themselves winning gold and silver medals at the Olympics for Team USA. On February 9th of 2021 the twins announced that they would both be retiring. Throughout their career the twins have advocated for and spoken out in support of gender equality in sports. During the week they retired, they released a memoir chronicling their fight for pay equity titled “*Dare to Make History: Chasing a Dream and Fighting for Equity*”. Like the USWNT, the twins “lead their national hockey team’s fight for fair and equal treatment by USA Hockey and the International Ice Hockey Federation - asking for not only equal pay compared to the men’s hockey team, but also equitable marketing support, maternity protections, and more funding for girls’ youth hockey programs” (Pepitone, 2021). The legacy these two athletes leave will extend beyond the ice rink and into the greater realm of female athletics helping to create a better future for women in sports.

As evidenced above, the conversation for equity in sports is happening everywhere today, proving that there is an audience that wants to consume female sports and believes in the athletic ability of women and girls.

### **Suggestions for Change**

Through my research by interview and survey analysis, I have been able to build a study examining the disparities, whether they exist or not, between men and women in collegiate athletics. Although much improvement has been made for female athletes on the collegiate level, as I learned from the experience of my three interview subjects, the surveyed athletes reported that progress is still needed. The biggest takeaways and suggestions for change revealed from the athletes themselves are as follows:

1. **More communication.** Between athletic administrators to athletic directors to coaches to players, communication has to happen more transparently and more often. Let athletes in on the scheduling process so they know it is going to be equitable. Educate all athletes on the differences in budgeting and how funding will affect their team. By providing transparency into the decision making process, athletes will be able to better understand how a school is working to create an equitable experience eliminating any distrust and misunderstanding between the athletes and the athletic department.
  
2. **Student committees.** A suggestion on how to improve communication is to form an athletics committee with student representatives. Among committee members could be representatives from both men's and women's teams, Title IX coordinators, athletic directors, and coaches. Allowing the athletes to become involved in this process will create a more unified approach within the department building trust between officials and athletes.
  
3. **Change the media perpetuated narrative.** The media, in all facets of life, has the ability to shape the public's perceptions of groups and individuals. Women's sports are grossly underrepresented on the top sports networks and news pages. If the media focused more on championing the female athlete, showing the women's games on national television, and putting women on the screen for their accomplishments and athletic knowledge instead of their bodies, I think a trickle down effect will occur impacting societies perceptions of the female athlete, and perhaps women in general.

Improving the experience for female athletes begins with improving the institutionalized gender expectations of the female.

Inequities still exist but great progress has been made. The progress that has been made has allowed me to participate in collegiate athletics and research women in sports in 2021. In a post Title IX era, disparities continue to exist within athletics both at the collegiate and professional level. The work isn't over and women are far from done. It is often said that "progress is a marathon, not a sprint", this change is structural, it is slow yet steady -- however, it is happening.

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Appendix

## Understanding Equity in Collegiate Athletics

Hello everyone,

My name is Bridget Schauder and I am a senior sociology major at Union College. For my senior thesis I am researching American sports culture and looking at issues of inequity for women in the world of sports using the USWNT as a case study. I am inviting you to participate in this survey to help me grasp a better understanding of the athletic experience regarding equity for female collegiate soccer players. Participation is voluntary and your responses will be kept anonymous and confidential.

\* Required

What division does your collegiate soccer team compete in? \*

- ☐ Division 1
- ☐ Division 2
- ☐ Division 3
- ☐ Other

What type of institution do you attend? \*

- ☐ Public
- ☐ Private

What class year are you?

- ☐ 2021
- ☐ 2022
- ☐ 2023
- ☐ 2024

Do you know your school's Title IX coordinator? \*

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ I don't think my school has one

If you answered 'Yes' to the previous question, how does the Title IX coordinator impact your experience? Or how does the coordinator interact with your team?

Your answer \_\_\_\_\_

As a collegiate athlete have you ever experienced issues of inequity? \*

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

If you feel comfortable and answered 'Yes' to the above question could you please provide an example? If you answered 'No', skip this question.

Your answer \_\_\_\_\_

For the next four questions please use the Men's soccer program at your institution as a point of comparison. On a scale of 1-10 how do you feel your program compares to the men's in regards to equity? (10 being entirely equal, 1 being entirely unequal). \*

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Entirely Unequal ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Entirely Equal

If you feel there are areas of inequity, could you please provide some? (Ex. practice times, uniform quality, bus quality)

Your answer \_\_\_\_\_

How do attendance rates from your institution's community compare at home games? \*

- ☐ The men always have more attendees
- ☐ The women always have more attendees
- ☐ Neither team gets many attendees
- ☐ Both teams have the same amount of attendees

On a scale of 1-10 do you think your institution promotes ALL men's and women's sports competition equally? (10 being entirely equal, 1 being entirely unequal). \*

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Entirely Unequal ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Entirely Equal

Does your team outperform the Men's team? (Use the Fall 2019 season, or historically to compare). \*

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Socially constructed gendered expectations tend to impact the way humans act.  
Do you feel comfortable at your institution to achieve your full athletic potential?

\*

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

When you hear the phrase “play like a girl”, how does that make you feel? (Select all that apply) \*

- ☐ Happy
- ☐ Angry
- ☐ Upset
- ☐ Frustrated
- ☐ Satisfied
- ☐ Okay
- ☐ Unbothered

Do you see any areas for improvement for women in athletics at the collegiate level? \*

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

If you answered 'Yes' to the previous question could you please provide an example?

Your answer

Do you see any areas for improvement for women in athletics outside of college sports? \*

☐ Yes

☐ No

If you answered 'Yes' to the previous question could you please provide an example?

Your answer

Please rate your overall experience as a student athlete at your school. (10 being the best, 1 being the worst)

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9      10

○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○