

The Impact of Title IX on Women in Sport: The Need to Achieve More

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Women in sport have struggled gaining equity dating back decades. In the early 19th century, women were perceived as “house workers,” “care takers,” and “fragile” based on the societal belief of gender ideology. Up to 1972, women were prohibited from participating until the passing of Title IX. Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 forbids discrimination based on sex in any school or education program that is funded by the federal government. This act paved the way for females receiving equal opportunities in leadership positions, such as admissions, teaching, K-12 and college educations, and participating in athletics. As a result, female participation numbers in sports dramatically rose after the passing of this law. Regardless of immense improvement from 1972, women in sport still suffer from equity disparities and discrimination in multiple sectors. These setbacks for females in the sport industry forces one to ponder: what impacts has Title IX really had on women in sport? Approaching this question from a sociology, psychology, and business management point of view allows one to grasp a better understanding of its true impact. Title IX has both positive and negative impacts. Although it has been fifty years since its passing, women are still discriminated against with a lack of equitable resources, facilities, representation in the media, coaching and leadership opportunities all stemming from society’s highly held belief of gender ideology.

Literature Review

The ideas of Victorian beliefs ultimately shaped the views of women participating in sports. According to Gregg (2017), Victorian beliefs set up the cultural ideas that women work in

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the house, while the men do the physical, arduous work outside. Before the passing of Title IX in 1972, medical officials believed that vigorous sports would cause women to become sterile or too masculine (Gregg, 2017). Approaching the mid-1800s, only the upper-class females were allowed to participate. However, the few sports permitted were golf, tennis, archery, and croquet. This was a huge milestone, yet the women were sexualized when forced to wear “feminine” clothing. Approaching 1890, participation in basketball was permitted with rules reducing the physical contact and intensity of the sport. This action was to ensure safety for the females participating since most highly believed they could not play at a rigorous level like the men (Gregg, 2017). Our society took this belief and, in most cases, still holds it to be true through gender ideology.

One organization that believed in the Victorian belief was the National Amateur Athletic Federation (NAAF). The head of this organization was especially against women intercollegiate athletic programs since they would follow the same model as the men’s programs. The model that would be adopted emphasizes “entertainment, professionalism, and commercialization” all of which would serve as a “distraction from their studies.” This organization was run with the understanding that vigorous sports are harmful to the female body. Any female program that excelled in highly competitive sports was destroyed to encourage noncompetitive sports (Gregg, 2017). Eventually, NAAF evolved into the organization known today as the Association for Intercollegiate Athletics for Women (AIAW). The AIAW was established a few months before Title IX was officially passed. They focused on the educational side and formed a student-athlete centered approach. The AIAW was the first athletic governing body to develop under an educational platform, with an academic first approach.

Fast forwarding to the passing of Title IX, it surpassed the medical myths allowing women to participate without discrimination. With that, the expansion of female participants within sports increasingly grew, allowing women to play from youth to professional leagues. Even so, a study conducted in 2021 proved medical professionals wrong with their Victorian belief or societal belief of gender ideology. Authors Rao and Shah (2021) examine the effects of athletics of both the male and female heart including cardiovascular systems. With the spike of females in sports, it was easier to gather stats on this subject. Research concluded that female athletes have lower chances of cardiac arrest, cardiovascular disease, and have improved durability in comparison to male athletes. Thus, challenging society and the medical officials contrary to female participation. Proven in the study, athletics do not inflict any more harm on the female body than they do on the male. Although this is one study, the results do contradict our society's beliefs. Women have paved new roads after Title IX and interesting enough, in the 2020 Olympic games there appeared to be more female than male athletes on team USA (Rao, 2021). The increase of female athletes will not diminish as there is more to be achieved.

With the recent 50th Anniversary of Title IX, we both celebrate and reflect on the impact. Due to Title IX, women are defying odds by obtaining “man held” positions in what was once considered a male dominated world. An example of this is Vice President Kamala Harris. Title IX has had a substantial impact, which is supported by the groundbreaking number of participants from its inception to now. Nonetheless, there are still downfalls even fifty years later. Gender inequities are still in existence. For instance, around 2019 through all college divisions, there were more opportunities for male athletes and a lack of investment of resources for female programs including but not limited to “money allocated for scholarships, recruiting,

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and coach compensation” (Staurowsky, 2022). Once the pandemic hit, women’s programs were threatened with being cut. Additionally, high schools and college athletics faced potential charges of Title IX for incompliance. Many schools were able to use the excuse of “not having enough time to add such opportunities to comply,” yet as of now it is an invalid response. Fifty years later, women still face challenges which were once thought to be solved. The Equity in Athletics Disclosure Act (EADA) which was passed in 1994, enforces colleges to publicly announce gender equity information about their sports programs, which in recent years highlighted major disproportionate opportunities between male and female athletes (Staurowsky, 2022). Therefore, it is easier to seek discrepancies and inequities within levels and programs.

To name a few differences still present today, there is a lack of media coverage for women, resources, facilities (locker room, weight room, etc.), food provided for the teams, and limited leadership opportunities. As of 2021, women’s sports coverage has been found to be inequitable in nearly every form of media from newspapers, television, and online sources. However, media such as internet-based publications and the National Collegiate Athletic Association News, a non-for-profit media source, are exceptions. Burroughs conducted research between both medias examining if athletic departments that are associated with the NCAA provide more coverage of female and male athletes on their official websites than they have in the past. Results concluded that female athletes received similar coverage, but not the same amount as male athletes. As Burroughs’s research found, “In articles and photographs on National Collegiate Athletic Association athletic department home webpages, females were underrepresented in comparison to their participation rates in collegiate athletics” (Burroughs, 2021). Burroughs also found that most images with female athletes were with male athletes, emphasizing the fact that female

participation *must* be approved by men. Title IX instituted millions of opportunities for female athletes, while it seems the NCAA is undermining their achievements.

This may have something to do with the Media Framing Theory. The Media Framing Theory controls the way society perceives and understands information. With this theory, the media only shows audiences what they want them to see. A sports journalist's top goal is to "create engaging narratives, heighten dramatic content of the event, and emphasize dominant ideologies in society." Since gender ideology is dominant, sports media continuously uses this which explains the lack of female coverage. Revisiting the belief of gender ideology, females are framed to be viewed in ways that represent traditional female characteristics such as "grace, beauty, balance, and aesthetics at the expense of their athleticism" (Burroughs, 2021). The media maintains the societal belief of gender ideology by keeping the men's sports ahead of women's, producing the image that women should not be "masculine."

Additionally, Loyola Marymount University (LMU) was recently questioned about the inequities between the men's and women's basketball locker rooms. Sports editor, Miles Thomas, dove into the story publishing it on the student paper at LMU. In 2020, the university ran a fundraising campaign, raising money to modernize the men's basketball locker room, hallways, etc. This campaign was specifically targeted to benefit the men's team as they included a "walk of champions" within the project outlines. Overall, the project costed about \$437,300-\$524,760 in renovations, all of which included new lighting, lockers, and a "back-lit LMU logo" on the ceiling (Thomas, 2021). The university's actions in this project frustrated the women's team as the LMU athletic department decided on "aesthetic enhancements" in the men's room over the persistent issues in the women's room. When questioned, the women's team stated that

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the university has not given the team any renovations and there are no thoughts of any in the meantime. However, they have brought issues with their room to light, all of which have been ignored. For instance, their lockers are made from wood and attract ants in the summer, they have four showers, and it is small as they could not use it during COVID for that reason. Since this issue was brought to light by media, the university was forced to respond since there is a possible Title IX violation. The athletic director claims there will be upcoming renovations, but no one has heard anything along those lines. Although this situation most likely will not go anywhere further, the team holds the university to a moral responsibility to provide both male and female athletes equal opportunities and facilities (Thomas, 2021). This recent example shows that inequities still exist between female and male athletes, even fifty years after Title IX. It is essential to continue fighting for equity because women's sports programs are sometimes at risk of being discontinued to maintain running men's programs.

Lastly, women not only struggle to keep their programs afloat, but struggle to obtain leadership positions within sports. Being in a "male-dominated and centered" world, women tend to have a high turnover rate making it incredibly hard to obtain a leadership position. Title IX has indeed opened many doors for women in sport, yet it lacks in assisting women from gaining higher leadership positions, especially for college athletics. Once again, gender ideology plays a role in the inequality within coaching and administration positions. With that, there are few female leaders resulting in a lack of mentorship and support for younger females seeking out higher level positions. Title IX has improved and increased female participation in college athletics, however it has not for leadership opportunities (Van Kirk, 2023). Interesting enough, before Title IX, programs such as the Association for Intercollegiate Athletics for Women

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(AIAW) were run by female directors and coaches. Yet after Title IX, these programs merged with men's programs forcing women out of leadership positions. Evidently, discrimination problems occur the most in male-dominated programs. The research Van Kirk found suggests a societal belief makeover, creating equal and more opportunities for women in sport. The media can either help solve this issue or perpetuate it. Time will only tell.

Confirmation

Thanks to Title IX, millions of girls and women are participating in sports nationwide today. As addressed before, gender ideology is the prime reason for the variety of issues still in existence. In the 1960s, the NCAA did not support the idea of collegiate sports for women making it incredibly hard for participation. The AIAW's approach and model did not survive too long and eventually folded into the NCAA. This was because the NCAA was focusing on the financial gain of supporting women intercollegiate athletics. For that reason, the AIAW lost most of their finances fighting for control of women's intercollegiate sports. In 1981, the NCAA started offering Division I national championships and eliminated fees (travel costs, etc.) for their member schools. As a result, many colleges and universities shifted their women's programs to the NCAA. The AIAW, unable to compete with the well-developed NCAA officially crumbled in 1982. The change unfortunately set women's leadership and participation backwards. For instance, in 1972, approximately 90% of women's teams were coached by women while today there is about 43% of women's teams with female head coaches. For administration positions, 18% of NCAA administrators are women, whereas in 1972 they made 90% of administrators (Gregg, 2017). This is because the NCAA is a male-dominated

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organization with around 83% of men standing as athletic directors. Title IX unfortunately had a negative impact, taking female dominated leadership positions backwards for the time being.

Diving into professional sports, women were permitted to play certain sports but dressed to follow the gender ideology. For example, the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League (AAGPBL) was created to encourage entertainment during World War II because the men were off fighting. This was a groundbreaking opportunity for women to play a “man’s sport,” yet it came with downfalls. Phillip Wrigley, the founder of the AAGPBL complied with Victorian principles by requiring players to wear short skirts and makeup, go to a school to learn how to “display a feminine image and learn proper manners” (Gregg, 2017). Although these women received an opportunity as such, the Victorian belief once again had to weave its way in. This ideology forced “femininity” into sports to eliminate the risk of women becoming “masculine.” Especially since these professional games were being broadcasted, to maintain belief in the gender ideology it was necessary to emphasize femininity over masculinity. There is only one message pushed across every media source which was that women should never become “masculine.”

Sports do have impactful benefits for females as well. Many scholars admit that females who participate in sports tend to have better grades, higher self-confidence, and self-esteem (Gregg, 2017). This is understandable since athletes need to maintain a certain grade point average to participate in their respective sport. Student-athletes rarely have time to relax and are constantly running back and forth from school to practices or games. Time management is an important skill developed by athletes. These skills and characteristics transfer from athletics into everyday work lives. If females are more confident with themselves while playing sports, then

why would society try to diminish their achievements? The more confident one is, the more accomplishments are to be made. Females participating in sports can only increase society's progress for a working culture. Women can contribute to society just as much as men.

Development of skills and characteristics start with athletics and are achievable for both males and females.

Counterargument

Research examining the medical effects athletics have on the body is still a work in progress. The male and female bodies are two different structures requiring multiple studies for each to examine the real impact sports have. Rao's study conducted on the female cardiovascular system and heart provided important relevant information, but there are more studies to be conducted. The human body is a complex structure and not one is the same as another, bodies react differently to different activities. Rao's study has valid results and evidence disproving gender ideology, but they might not reflect every athlete's heart. Rao's research serves as a catalyst to develop and further research on this subject.

Although there is much work to be completed, Title IX has helped women immensely. Despite issues of obtaining leadership, there are many successful females within the sports world. As of 2023, the NFL has had twelve female owners known as Kim Pegula, Amy Trask, Dee Haslam, Martha Ford, Amy Strunk, Denise York, Virginia McCaskey, Carol Davis, Gayle Benson, Janice McNair, Sheila Hamp, and Jody Allen. These twelve women are well known, successful businesswomen serving as owners and CEOs (Omuya, 2023). The NFL is an extremely wealthy, well-known, and a "male-dominated" organization, therefore this is groundbreaking news. However, not to diminish their accomplishments, most of these women

obtained these positions through their fathers or husbands, whether it be through co-ownership or passing of the “torch” when someone died. They were fortunate enough to have the contacts to secure their position of leadership where not every female has those opportunities.

Lastly, one may argue Title IX is good where it is at because female participation numbers surpass those of men. According to the NCAA website, women’s teams outnumber men’s teams with “10,586 NCAA women’s teams that compete in championship sports compared to the 9,159 men’s teams” (NCAA, 2021). These numbers are groundbreaking success for women and would not have been achievable without Title IX. Additionally, during the 2020 Olympics, there were more U.S. female athletes competing than there were male athletes (Rao, 2021). For a society that seems to oppose female athletes and women sports, these athletes are managing to breakthrough the established societal barriers.

Implications

It is valuable to continue to generate, push, and enforce change for women in sport with the assistance of Title IX. Over the past fifty years, Title IX has impacted many lives along with generating numerous opportunities, but the need to revise, add, and perpetuate more change within the law is vitally important. The focus is geared towards *all* women in sports, from all scopes like leadership position opportunities, representation in the media, the physical toll on the body, and equity of facilities and resources. What many do not realize or focus on are the discrepancies that exist past first glance. Participation opportunities tend to cast a shadow over the deeper issues discussed. Many believe that since we are half a century in under Title IX legislation everything is great. Title IX has improved women in sports immensely, yet there is so much in our blind spots that we simply skim over.

More research and effort are required to make change possible. It starts back with the enforcement of Title IX throughout schools and universities. Ultimately to eliminate discrimination issues and lack of equitable resources requires the elimination of the societal belief of gender ideology. Obviously, this will take time and most likely will never disappear completely, however society can change its beliefs to shift away from this ideology. The media plays a huge role in reinforcing this ideology; therefore, they can reduce using the beliefs in sports coverage. If the media changes coverage from gender ideology to a more acceptable ideology, viewers will most likely forget about the gender ideology in a matter of time. The impacts of Title IX fall under the sociology umbrella, which evidently affects more than female athletes themselves. Title IX impacts everyone, men, women, and *all* athletes whether they know it or not. Everyone deserves equitable opportunities, resources, and facilities, no matter their gender.

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