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“No But”--Understanding Sally Jenkins’ Friction with Feminism

Steve Master and Taylor Joy Mitchell

In a conversation years ago with the late, legendary college basketball coach Pat Summitt, *Washington Post* sports columnist Sally Jenkins asked Summitt if she was a feminist (“To ‘Sum It Up’”). It seemed an odd question, considering Summitt’s unparalleled role in the rise of women’s athletics. Yet, for sports journalism scholars, Jenkins’ question was compelling for another reason. What if Summitt had responded by asking, “Are you?” Much like Summitt, Jenkins has achieved success in an overwhelmingly male-dominated profession, and she has moved the needle forward for women in sports and, by extension, for women in general. Her visibility allows her to influence the way millions of readers understand gender issues in sports. Certainly no sign carrier (which would defy journalistic ethics), Jenkins has often questioned her “feminist credentials,” particularly when she takes contrarian positions on issues near and dear to second-wave feminists. These positions mirror, to some degree, the historic conflict and evolution of the feminist movement in America. Considering that sports is such a fertile ground from which to grapple with feminist concerns, Jenkins should be considered a highly influential ally, whose career success and distinctive, if sometimes controversial, voice reflects the multifaceted later waves of feminism.

Heralded as one of the world’s most talented sports journalists, Jenkins currently writes for the *Post*. In 2005 she was the first woman inducted into the National Sportscasters and Sportswriters Hall of Fame. She worked for the iconic magazine *Sports Illustrated*, has authored twelve books, and serves as a guest analyst on sports television and radio shows. She has twice been named Associated Press’s Sports Columnist of the Year, most recently in 2010, and is respected not only by colleagues and readers but those about whom she writes. Amid a high-profile sexual abuse scandal at Penn State University in 2012, an ailing Joe Paterno chose Jenkins to

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conduct what was essentially his death-bed interview. When Summitt was diagnosed with early onset Alzheimer's disease, she selected Jenkins to tell her story, later described by *New York Magazine* as one of the "more crowning achievements in modern sports writing" (Leitch). Among Jenkins' more distinguishing qualities are her witty, creative writing style and her habit of practicing what journalism scholar Roy Peter Clark of the Poynter Institute tags Collateral Journalism: getting beyond the sensationalism of a major sports story and exploring it for "its higher implications, to help us get beyond the obvious, and through the secret doors into American culture." Considering these accolades and attributes, and Jenkins' standing as arguably the most prominent female voice in sports journalism, her connection to feminism presents an ideal landscape for analysis.

Based on the basic definition of feminism and her support for gender equity, Jenkins surely qualifies as a feminist, but her sports coverage aligns more closely with third- or fourth-wave feminism. Applying a wave metaphor to the large, complex feminist movement in America can be controversial, as many feminisms have existed within each wave. The metaphor also discounts pre-invasion feminists fighting oppression long before colonization and suffrage. However, the wave metaphor can be useful to reveal differences between the primary aims and tactics of each movement. After the first-wave championed voting rights, the second-wave sought to improve the social status of women, coining phrases like the "personal is political." These first two waves generally consisted of white, educated middle-class women. Third-wave feminists wanted a more inclusive community¹, and they debunked essentialist views like a universal womanhood. Beginning in the early 1990s, thanks in part to Rebecca Walker's "Becoming the Third Wave," the movement "arose from within the second wave, as opposed to after it" (Mann and Huffman). Fourth-wave feminism also grows out of and against previous waves. Like their predecessors, fourth-wave feminists focus on intersectionality and micropolitics, challenging oppression and sexism in everyday instances. Although too early to determine the specifics of the newest iteration, fourth-wave feminism is dependent on the internet (Munro). Digitally

driven, these feminists use technology to extend third-wave’s call-out culture; they are body positive, trans and queer inclusive, and anti-misandry (Sollee). As the movement’s aims shift, so do the various strategies used to gain gender parity. Jenkins’ positions and techniques imitate these later waves. Not only does Jenkins purposefully pit herself against second-wave feminists like the National Organization of Women (NOW), she also demands a more elaborate understanding of the oppressions female athletes face.

Oppressions abound in both sports and journalism. In *Forbes*’ “The Most Powerful Women in Sports,” Jason Belzer reports that “the glass ceiling for women may be lower in sports than in any other industry.” In January 2016, the Buffalo Bills hired Kathryn Smith--the NFL’s first female coach in its 100-year history, and in August 2015, the San Antonio Spurs hired six-time WNBA All-Star Becky Hammon as the NBA’s first female assistant coach (Davis). Approximately one-third of scholastic and college athletes are women, and the percentage of disparity is far greater on the professional level (“Empowering Women”). When women do get paid to play sports, gaps in pay equity are astonishing; the women’s \$2 million prize for the World Cup pales in comparison to the men’s \$9 million prize (Close). The pay gap could be attributed to factors besides blatant sexism: women still simply get paid less than men in all industries; droves of fans do not watch female sports, with tennis and gymnastics being the exceptions; female athletes do not garner the same corporate sponsorships; and major media outlets do not cover female sports. According to Sarah Laskow’s “The Olympics are the Closest to Coverage Parity Female Athletes Get,” media covers “women in sports” less than 5% of total time, and Laskow claims that number is “generous.” Less media coverage of female athletes is not surprising considering that journalism is dominated by men: according to the American Society of News Editors 2013 consensus, men make up two-thirds of all newsroom positions: essentially the same gender breakdown in scholastic and collegiate sports (Joyce).

These pitiful statistics are rooted in the deeply embedded cultural assumptions that males, and therefore male sports, are dominant, which makes them more entertaining and, thus, more worthy

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of financial backing and loyal fans. In *Gendering Bodies*, Sara Crawley, Lara Fowley, and Constance Shenan explain how sports grows out of and reinforces cultural values, acting as a prime “site for constructing meanings about bodies” that are constantly “gendered, or encouraged to participate in (heterosexual) gender conformity” (56, xiii). Divisions between men’s and women’s sports reinforce bodily differences, and the sports industry continues to devalue women’s bodies in favor of the elite men or men’s team sports and their fan base. Ticket price differences between the women’s and men’s NCAA’s Final Four reflect this favoritism: a fan could shell out \$570 per guest for the 2017 NCAA Men’s Basketball Final Four championship game versus \$75 per guest to watch all three Women’s Basketball Final Four games (“Championship Tickets”). The staggering difference can also be attributed to the way the media covers men’s sports; the women’s Final Four is no less exciting than the men’s, but without the media hoopla, viewers assume it is. Media coverage, or lackluster coverage, undoubtedly changes the perception of gendered sports. If more media time is devoted to women’s sports, some goals that ushered Title IX through Congress four decades ago might be realized.

Because Jenkins exists at the nexus of these two very complex sites for gender studies--sports and media -- her feminist allegiances need to be recognized. The media in general, and sports journalism in particular, is failing women. Sports, as declared by Sadie Stein’s *Jezebel* article, continues to be “one of feminists’ stickiest subjects.” Media, per the Women’s Media Center (WMC), is having a “crisis of representation” (“The Problem”). WMC presented bleak data for its third annual Status of Women in the U.S. Media 2013 report. Newsrooms contain only 36.3 women, down from 1999 data (“The Status of Women”). To top those dismal numbers, the Institute for Diversity and Ethics in Sports assigned sports journalism an “F” for gender representation in columnist and editors in 2014. Women make up 10% of the industry and must daily encounter blatant and subtle sexism such as the Bleacher Report’s hottest female reporters, harassment from fans, athletes, and colleagues, and incredibly high barriers to entry for

women or minorities (Lapchick). In sum, Jenkins is a “rare breed” with a “uniquely difficult beat” (Morrison).

Why She is Clearly Feminist

More than any sports journalist, Jenkins has passionately highlighted the advances--and inequities--connected to women’s sports. A fierce defender of Title IX, she described the law as “the real Equal Rights Amendment,” arguing “no other piece of social legislation in the last 50 years has had a more profound redistributing effect in American society” (“Title IX Opponents”). In a pointed *Post* column commemorating the 30th anniversary of the law, she describes its impact on women as a “seismic shift from the decorative to the active” and acknowledged it as a “dirty little secret” that, despite its positive impact, has never been fully enforced due to the sanctity of college football. In the column’s crescendo, she wrote

If you doubt Title IX is a good and needed law, simply ask yourself what would happen if it were gutted or repealed. How many scholarships and resources would Division I athletic directors devote to women’s sports? The answer is, the Connecticut women’s basketball team would be holding bake sales to buy uniforms. (“Title IX Opponents”)

While Jenkins speaks to the 600% increase in women’s sports since Title IX’s enactment, the fact that she has had to repeatedly defend the law proves gender equity in sports is scarce.

Beyond defending Title IX, Jenkins has blistered network television for its scant coverage of women’s sports. Although quick to credit a few male newspaper colleagues for consistently covering the women’s Final Four, Jenkins has also taken to task the many who ignore the signature women’s event. In her 2007 column on the Rutgers-Don Imus controversy, Jenkins decried the irony of the widespread media attention finally being paid to women’s basketball. If Imus, a longtime radio talk show host, had not referred to Rutgers players as “nappy-headed hos,” the media would have

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continued its scant coverage. Jenkins reminded readers that “Some of the male sports columnists who weighed in this week annually neglect the women’s Final Four, and most of them failed to witness a single game in which Rutgers played” (“A Needed Conversation”). In a 2010 column, she again exposed broadcasters like ESPN *SportsCenter* that devoted barely 1.5% of air time to women’s sports over a 20-year period from 1989 to 2009 (“On Television”). While conceding that such editorial decisions are made using data and focus groups and that even women do not watch women’s sports in “huge numbers,” Jenkins argues, “it’s difficult for any sports to develop a connection with viewers when no one sees their replays, hears their echoes, gets to know their players” (“On Television”). Furthermore,

By failing to respond to cultural shifts and narrowing their coverage, [sports highlights producers] risk boring us. Market forces are one thing; poor editorial choices based on stubborn entrenchment is another. Their only obligation is to seek to expand the sports audience, not contract it by deprivation. (“On Television”)

Her declarations prove journalism’s irresponsibility to present women as equals.

Beyond using her columns to express entrenched cultural assumptions, Jenkins often reports on the gendered ways sports emphasize bodies. She did so with her piece on Mo’ne Davis, a Little League baseball sensation who, in 2014, “caused some powerful men to think in a different way about sport” (“Mo’ne Davis”). Jenkins accurately states that the only reason Davis “commanded record ESPN ratings” was because those men in charge of the industry “deemed her worthy” and “unrepulsive enough” (“Mo’ne Davis”). Jenkins’ unrepulsive comment might be read as outlandish, but when compared to Fox News’ council on whether the 2016 Olympians should wear makeup when accepting their medals, Jenkins’ analysis is fitting. Fox News commentators claimed the athletes needed to be physically fit and adhere to culturally acceptable definitions of beauty in order to get a fan base: “When you look like a washed-out rag, no one’s gonna support you” (qtd. in Pai).

By noting how male sportscasters highlight Davis’ pleasing physical features, Jenkins commentary reminds readers that the young, black athlete is in a triple or even quadruple bind. She will have to overcome age, gender, beauty, and racial biases. Jenkins predicts, with anger and regret, that Davis “can’t dream as big as the boys she beat” because of media coverage decisions--made mostly by male executives (“Mo’ne Davis”). As soon as Davis’ Little League spotlight fades, she will go back to fighting misconceptions about “muscle gaps.” Using data from the University of Minnesota’s Tucker Center for Research on Girls and Women in Sport, Jenkins censures the “relentless focus” on the arbitrary gendered binary that neglects a reality in which women regularly outperform men (“Mo’ne Davis”). Privileging masculinity and “muscle ignores that great performance is as much about head and heart and it perpetuates artificial barriers to women’s achievements and improvements, such as red tees and three-set tennis matches” (“Mo’ne Davis”).

The stories Jenkins tells of her own career arc, starting as one of the few woman sports writers in the early 1980s, illustrate the battles she fought to survive in a male-dominated profession while at the same time pushing, often in vain, for better coverage of women’s sports. She points out that it “wasn’t OK to be different” when she started as a sports writer, and she once considered it “a compliment if a reader said: ‘I just read that story and I didn’t even realize until afterward a woman wrote it’” (qtd. in Hoffarth, “Title IX”). In the offices of *Sports Illustrated*, she recalls having to fight to feature Olympic track and field gold medalist Jackie Joyner-Kersey, because running a story on Joyner-Kersey was “somehow depriving the male athlete of space It’s a very unconscious bias but very persistent and still needs to be addressed” (qtd. in Hoffarth, “The Sports Media”). Combined with her persistence in the face of these struggles, Jenkins’ consistent recognition of inequities in sports, championing of Title IX, and unabashed reporting would lead readers to believe that Jenkins would be hailed as a traditional feminist. However, Jenkins strategically situates herself against certain feminists.

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At Odds with NOW

One of the reasons Jenkins finds herself at odds with second-wave feminism is her tendency to take--and skillfully argue--positions that contrast sharply with mainstream opinion on sports issues. Influenced by her father, sports journalist Dan Jenkins, Jenkins often takes a contrarian approach with her analysis. "My dad taught me this," Jenkins said in an interview with writer Jerry Barca: "You take the prevailing attitude, you turn it upside down and you ask yourself if the opposite point of view is smarter. And, a lot of times it is" (Barca). For example, she has fiercely defended athletes' rights to use performance-enhancing drugs ("Want to End"). She sprung to the defense of Olympic swimmer Michael Phelps after his notorious bong hit incident, remarking that 42% of Americans had "gotten sweetly baked on hay" in their lifetime ("We Shouldn't Be Surprised"). Flashing her characteristic wit, she certainly challenged conventional orthodoxy at the Sochi, Russia, Olympics with her audacious (but serious) claim that figure skaters are superior athletes to the ice hockey players: "Tell a hockey player to jump four feet off the ice and whirl four times, then land on one leg--backwards--on a blade an eighth of an inch wide" ("Figure Skating"). While this approach makes her columns fascinating to read and keeps her comments section lively, it often places her at odds with typical views and iconic figures.

A particularly compelling example of Jenkins' contrarian approach was her insistence that Imus not be removed from the airwaves after his racially-charged slur about the Rutgers basketball players. Jenkins suggested that silencing Imus would constitute "undue harshness" and would waste an opportunity for a necessary conversation ("A Needed Conversation"). Calling for removal seemed justified. When Imus compared the "nappy headed" players to those on the Tennessee team, he equated ugliness with blackness, and then he sexualized the players by calling them "hos." His comment reflects the violent aspects of a white patriarchal society: the over-sexualization of black bodies stems from slavery and extends into the "disproportionate rates of rape, sexual assault and violence against women of color" ("Nappy Headed Hoes"). The day after Imus' "ho" comment went viral, the Feminist Majority

Foundation sprang into action, joining a rally at the Rutgers’ Douglass campus and sending out more than 100,000 emails demanding Imus’ sacking (“Feminist News”). NOW started the “Dump Don” campaign (C. Jenkins). Even though Imus went on Al Sharpton’s show to apologize, Sharpton joined with NOW and others to appeal for Imus’ firing (Faber). The national stage was set for a showdown, with a large swath of the American public on par with Imus’ removal. Jenkins’ position conflicted with responses from the National Association of Black Journalists, national companies (eight pulled advertising spots), and sign-carrying feminists (Johnson).

In her article, Jenkins explains that firing Imus would simply reiterate the unnecessary “harsh vengeance.” Instead, Jenkins wants Imus to become Rutgers’ biggest fan, “sit[ting] . . . in the front row wearing a sweat shirt with a big letter R on it at every home game” (“A Needed Conversation”). Jenkins suggests shifting the conversation about Imus’ vitriol to him “us[ing] his microphone to promote and defend a deserving sport,” one that, as she reminds readers, gets terribly scant media attention (“A Needed Conversation”). She wanted Imus to get to know the individual players and replace blanket generalities of sexism and racism. Here, her contrarian approach requires patience and thought; it goes against the second-wave feminist urge to fire Imus while simultaneously using traditional feminist techniques like consciousness-raising to get a conversation started. She wanted Imus to actually listen to the players--this listening remains a key component of third-wave feminists. In “Feminism Now: What the Third Wave is Really About,” Kelsey Lueptow ranks listening as one of the five elements of the feminist movement; for Lueptow, “One of the most important and underrated goals of feminism is to listen to the cultural messages bombarding us.” Jenkins’ call for Imus to stay on air supports this goal.

While the Imus controversy illustrates Jenkins’ contentious relationship with second-wave feminists, she has often posited questions about her own “feminist credentials” (“Tebow’s”). On 28 January 2016, Jenkins tweeted that she was a “No but’ feminist” in response to a *Post* online survey asking “What type of feminist (or anti-feminist) are you?” (@sallyjenx). The survey’s categories

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range from “Hell, yeah” to “Certainly not” feminist. The “No but” group of responders is “distinguished by the fact that none of them identifies as a feminist But . . . they largely support progressive policy positions . . . [and] view feminism as optimistic and empowering.” This group’s views directly correspond with Jenkins’ stated stance on feminism: her refusal to be a sign carrier coupled with her championing of policies like Title IX. The survey itself—its title, section, and responses—reveals the contemporary, conflicted thoughts about feminism and the emergence of new waves of feminism that work to reconcile issues surrounding the second-wave feminism.

One issue Jenkins addresses is that the second-wave feminist movement, what she calls the “feminist mainstream,” appears to act as a monolithic movement headed by NOW. This condemnation is more than Jenkins being contrarian for contrarians’ sake; NOW does seem to maintain a singular focus on reproductive rights, ignoring many other equity concerns. However, this was not always NOW’s perception. In 1966, Betty Friedan gathered the disgruntled cohorts of the Third National Conference of Commissions on the Status of Women in her DC hotel; she scribbled NOW on a napkin, and the women who attended this meeting vowed to change the glacier movement of sex equality (“Founding”). NOW was nimble in the beginning; it formed seven basic task forces. It organized, petitioned, marched, and got results. It pushed through the Equal Rights Amendment and ceased segregated “Help Wanted” advertisements (“Highlights”). Nevertheless, 60 years later, Jenkins refers to the organization as one built on “group-think, elitism, and condescension” (“Tebow’s”).

Jenkins is not the first to attack NOW. Dissident feminist and author of *Sexual Personae* Camille Paglia consistently comments on its group-thinking (“Has Feminism Gone”). Author and political activist Barbara Ehrenreich distanced herself from the organization during President Clinton’s sexual assault cases (Ehrenreich). Other feminists have long criticized NOW for its focus on white, middle-class, or otherwise privileged positions. Thirty-five years ago, Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzáldua published *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings By Radical Women of Color* in response to

a sustained neglect of theories and practices of the feminisms of women of color. Other sign-carrying feminists have also commented on what seems like NOW's condescension of men. Karen DeCrow, a former NOW president, became skeptical of the group's stance on men's rights; while never disavowing her NOW roots, DeCrow often acted as legal counsel in paternity cases (Young). Like Jenkins, these women have all found fault with some aspect of the second-wave's flagship organization.

Aligned with Later Waves

Coupled with her derision of NOW, Jenkins' contrarian journalistic style reveals her alliance with third- or fourth-wave feminists. Three columns in particular illustrate this: her defense of Olympic athletes posing nude in national magazines, her argument that sports culture condones assaults on women, and her support of Heisman Trophy winner Tim Tebow's pro-life Super Bowl advertisement.

In her August 2000 article “Female Athlete's New Clothes are Not What Some Think,” Jenkins argues that the recent splurge of nude photographs reflects a much needed “redefinition” of feminism. Jenkins reviews the feminist response to four instances of female athletes appearing in various states of semi-undress in *Sports Illustrated*, *Esquire*, and *Women's Sports & Fitness*. The Women's Sports Foundation (WSF) condemned the athletes' actions, even though there was not a “single, actual, verifiable nipple in sight” (“Female Athlete's”). Then-executive director Donna Lopiano crafted the WSF's hardline response: “Any exposure in a sports magazine that minimizes athletic achievement and skill and emphasizes the female athlete as a sex object is insulting and degrading” (qtd. in O'Keefe). Lopiano stresses the consistent objectification of women within advertisement and hints at the problematic sexualization of a specific group of athletes gaining more attention and power. The 2000 Olympic games were the first time that women could “compete in the same number of team sports as men” (O'Keefe), and, according to the International Olympic

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Committee, women comprised 42% of competing athletes; they set 23 out of 39 world records, and American women won 40% of the medals (Holste). The more women who compete more successfully in a traditionally masculine arena, the bigger threat they pose. This success is one reason why these women were not depicted in action like their male counterparts; rather, their media images oscillated from hyper-feminization to hyper-sexualization, from clean-cut sorority girls to provocatively-posed nudes. Associate Professor of Journalism and Media Linda Steiner claimed the nude photos “diminish” the athlete’s power and strength by “putting them in their sexual place” (qtd. O’Keefe). The female athletes are sold to the public as wives and mothers to stave off fears of homosexuality, as beauty queens not powerhouses, or as portion and parcel of a full human in order to dehumanize or strip them of a full identity (Holste). For certain feminists then, the photographs continued to connect sex and sport because the men in American media and the sports industry would gain financially from this objectification. Jenkins, on the other hand, recognizes that these are the facts for female athletes, so she presents alternative ways to view these photos.

Like other third-wave feminists, Jenkins positions herself against the “self-appointed moralists and feminist guardians” and wants to “eschew victimization” and find other ways to define beauty (Rampton). Some third-wave feminists would suggest that athletes gain a sense of empowerment by stripping down and selling the somewhat explicit images of their bodies. For instance, after the 1996 Olympics, male athletes were also posing nude and “photographers, perhaps for the first time, were using the same kinds of shots and lighting techniques when photographing male and female athletes” (Heywood and Dworkin 27). This “equal-opportunity exploitation” provided any viewer—not just a white-male gaze—with images that challenged old dichotomies and reinforced the notion that although athletes’ bodies were available for public consumption, the athletes had a say in that transaction. Dominique Dawes, the president-elect of WSF in 2004 and a gold medalist member of the 1996 U.S. gymnastics team, states that “any other female athlete had earned the right to choose where and how they

appeared in the media” (qtd. in Drape). For Dawes and other athletes, this perspective shift is about choice. Corralie Simmons, 2000 Olympic silver medal water polo winner, said she felt that women in sports had increased the positive images of women: “I think it’s become better because you can represent yourself any way that you want at this point” (qtd. in Drape). Dawes clarifies that “It’s a personal choice, and if an athlete wants to portray herself in a certain light, it’s up to her” (qtd. in Drape). Adding women’s choice into the equation of what happens to their bodies mimics certain changes in feminism regarding nudity and pornography. Jenkins’ analysis reflects more contemporary feminist perspectives, as she situates these photos in terms of sexuality, pornography, and the historical debate between nude and naked.

Even those who Jenkins calls “creaking, old-school feminists” have long deliberated feminism’s relationship to pornography (“Female Athlete’s”). The 1980s witnessed heated debates between the anti-porn feminist movement, which wanted to ban the production of pornography, and the liberal feminists, who viewed industry censorship as dangerous. In 1985, Betty Friedan’s question “Is One Woman’s Sensuality Another Woman’s Pornography?” was red lettered on the April cover of *Ms.* magazine, NOW’s leading print publication. Anti-porn feminists like Catherine MacKinnon and Andrea Dworkin argue that, beyond a causal link, pornography is the reason women are objectified. Pornography makes women’s bodies objects, available for men’s consumption; pornography reifies the connection between violence and women, as it’s easier to incur violence on an object (Papadaki). Most anti-porn feminists want to censor the whole industry because it acts as an “apparatus” of a patriarchal society, created by and aimed at men, and it forces women to engage in heterosexual “acts that perpetuate ideas about male domination” (Levine). Unlike the anti-porn movement, the pro-porn feminists do not “blame” pornography for problems that arise in a patriarchal society; rather, they perceive porn as an extension of a society that institutionalizes degrading policies against women. Pro-porn feminists want to remove the shame levied on those involved in porn and highlight how the “industry . . . provides them with financial stability and the opportunity to explore

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their sexuality” (Levine). Liberal feminists would stress the act of choosing what a woman does with her own body, “rather than . . . the content of any choice” (McElroy). Liberal and pro-sex feminists, consisting of academics and sex workers alike, express concerns over censorship and how it is usually used against the subjugated. Pro-sex feminists go even further than commending choice; they see it as beneficial to women. When third-wave feminists rethink the pornography debate, they tend to focus on sex positivity, gender equality, and sexual freedom. R. Claire Snyder-Hall contends in “Third-Wave Feminism and the Defense of ‘Choice’” that “third-wave feminism respects the right of women to decide for themselves how to negotiate the often contradictory desires for both gender equality and sexual pleasure.” This view is more than the liberal feminists’ endorsement of choice and different from the pro-sex championing of pornography; it should be recognized as third-wave feminists’ “deep respect for pluralism and self-determination” (Snyder-Hall). This respect for choice underscores Jenkins’ decade-old argument that Olympian swimmer Jenny Thompson made a choice about her body, one that should be respected.

In her article, Jenkins posits a different angle than the hard-line feminist response to the nudity. She begins by claiming she is currently naked, “waiting for the schoolmarms and the sore-heads and the Robespierres to haul me off to the thought police at any second” (“Female Athlete’s”). To solidify this rhetorical effect, she says she stands in solidarity with the athletes who stripped down against the “sports prudes and creaking, old-school feminists” (“Female Athlete’s”). The conflation of prudes, soreheads, and schoolmarms is logical, but Jenkins’ connection between the Robespierres and old-school feminists suggests that second-wave feminists use force to impose loyalty to a cause the way Maximilien Robespierre did during the French Revolution. For Jenkins, Thompson’s disrobing was a “pinup for subversion, not sex” (“Female Athlete’s”). Jenkins’ penchant for subversives extends a long way back, particularly to her admiration for Summitt. While third-wave feminists do not necessarily equate themselves with subversives, they do recognize the need for feminism to shift and

try to do so from within the movement. Jenkins’ assertion that “feminist guardians . . . misread the photograph” marks her as a third-wave feminist (“Female Athlete’s”). Jenkins wants readers to recognize the distinction between Thompson baring her breast and her muscles: “What we are seeing firsthand is a redefinition of femininity into something more complicated and brawny--and it’s high time” (“Female Athlete’s”). Jenkins’ redefinition spotlights what she viewed as a monolithic second-wave feminist response to the nude photos, calling attention to particular biases and presenting an intricate response to nudity in sport.

Ten years later, Jenkins again engaged in the practices of call-out culture when she wrote about the connections between sex and sport, most notably when she reviewed three tragic sports stories that broke in spring 2010. Pittsburgh Steelers quarterback Ben Roethlisberger was accused of raping a woman in the restroom of a Georgia bar. New York Giants Hall of Fame linebacker Lawrence Taylor was charged with the third degree rape of a 16-year-old, and a University of Virginia lacrosse player, George Huguely, was charged in the beating death of his girlfriend, a fellow U. Va. lacrosse player. Jenkins writes that the murderer’s teammates likely knew of the danger he presented to his girlfriend; yet, their “fraternal silence” protected him. Jenkins asks, “Is there something in our sports culture that condones these attacks?” (“George”). More provokingly, she wondered whether male athletes, in general, pose a threat to women: “It’s a difficult, even upsetting, question because it risks demonizing scores of decent, guiltless men. But we’ve got to ask it, because there’s something going on here, a disturbing association” (“George”). In an interview with Steve Master, Jenkins admits that the column drew extensive criticism from feminists, mainly for her conclusion that women are helpless to address this problem: “The truth is, women can’t do anything about this problem. Men are the only ones who can change it--by taking responsibility for their locker room culture, and the behavior and language of their teammates” (“George”). Second-wave feminist criticism would have stemmed from Jenkins’ claim that “women can’t do anything” to help correct the unequal gender dynamics that consistently occur in the male-dominated sports industry.

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Gender dynamics and how to approach male privilege have historically been a source of tension in feminist movements. Male privilege in a patriarchal society might be invisible for some, but it exists. As evidence, contemporary feminists point to wage discrepancies, representation in politics and national corporations, or the fact that one-in-five U.S. women has been raped or experienced sexual assault. Feminists have treated this privilege in a variety of ways. First-wave feminists ignited the idea that women have the potential to contribute to society just as much, if not more than, men currently did; Susan B. Anthony's slogan, adopted by first-wave feminists, was "Men, their rights and nothing more! Women, their rights and nothing less!" Decades later, second-wave feminists carved out women-only spaces and conducted consciousness-raising sessions, with the focus strictly on women's experiences. Responding to a host of oppressions, second-wave feminists made the personal political and focused on the unequal power afforded to men. Some radical feminists fought for a matriarchy, and others, like Robin Morgan, have been pigeonholed as man-haters for struggling for sisterhood (Freedman). Less radical feminists used individual men in positions of power (e.g., employer, husband) as a springboard to critique institutions--from the workplace to the sports-media complex (Freedman). Unlike separatist feminists who believed that the inclusion of men in feminist politics would curb any social change, third- and fourth-wave feminists realize the need for men to join in the cause for equality (Rampton). In her 2014 United Nations speech introducing the HeForShe campaign, *Harry Potter* star Emma Watson implored men to fight gender equality: "If men don't have to be aggressive in order to be accepted, women won't feel compelled to be submissive. If men don't have to control, women won't have to be controlled" ("Emma"). Watson imparts how patriarchy can be equally detrimental to men who adopt carefully, cultural-constructed notions of masculinity--including the violence Jenkins condemns. The criticism against the HeForShe campaign--that it reinforces gender binaries and white privilege--proves that third- and fourth-wave feminists work in different ways to understand the "larger cultural and social picture that conditions masculinities, male anxieties and

behavior and shapes men’s sexual and familiar relationships with women” (Aston 79). Third-wave feminist bell hooks recognized that excluding men from the fight would reflect the sexist contradiction feminism in general wishes to eradicate. Similarly, Jenkins pleads that men address locker-room culture and fix the problem of violence against women inherent in sport culture.

Jenkins uses third-wave tactics to dissect the internalization of oppressive structures--another aspect of third-wave, post-structuralist feminism. Relying on French social thinkers like Michel Foucault who theorize about the effects of oppressive hegemonic power structures, those feminists assert that identities are constructed based on language, discourse, and culture practices (Mann and Huffman). By analyzing the power structure of the sports industry and male-dominated cultural sub-groups like fraternities, Jenkins wonders if men involved in sports have internalized the toxic aspects of a traditional masculine identity. According to Harvey Mansfield’s *Manliness*, dominant masculine attributes include power/strength, rationality, heterosexuality, risk-taking, dominance, leadership, control, and repression of emotions (23). These attributes, particularly the repression of emotion, are constantly played out in the sports industry, as in all fraternity cultures. Thus, when Jenkins questions if something in the lacrosse culture led to the murder of Yeardeley Love, the answer is a resounding yes. To be successful, a player needs to be loyal, physically fit, competitive, poised, and aggressive.

Whether athletes come to their sport culture with these hyper-masculine tendencies or develop them within the all-male group, they directly relate to sexual aggression and the subordination and sexualization of women. Because these groups value power and aggression, anything less is deemed feminine, reinforcing notions that women are weak, easily controlled, and commodifiable. The loyalty needed to score on the field keeps players from ratting out each other off of the field. These gendered tendencies reverberate throughout the culture and beyond because athletes wield enormous economic power--like million-dollar university budgets. Sports editor for *The Nation* Dave Zirin calls college athletes “deified entitled campus leaders who have a tremendous amount of

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influence on their communities.” For example, as soon as the Missouri football team joined student protests, the university president resigned (Glesson). This power correlates with the statistics: even though “one in three college assaults [is] committed by athletes,” conviction rates hover around 30% (Benedict and Keteyian). As the Department of Education investigates more than 160 higher education institutions for sexual violence allegations, charges are hardly ever imposed on the schools, the athletic program, or the athlete (Benedict and Keteyian). The perceived lack of consequences becomes a reality for many athletes. Sexual violence does not happen in a vacuum; if schools and the sports industry continue to avoid charging assailants and silencing victims, these all-male groups will remain breeding grounds for sexual aggression. Thus, when Jenkins exclaims that men need to do something about locker-room culture, she wants men to recognize how they internalize the oppressive aspects of an industry that values violence and aggression. Here, as in other articles, Jenkins exposes another angle, this time standing up against a feminism that excludes men.

In 2014, Jenkins took another stand against NOW when it demanded to remove a pro-life, Super Bowl television ad featuring Heisman Trophy-winning quarterback Tim Tebow and his mother. In “Tebow’s Super Bowl Ad Isn’t Intolerant; Its Critic Are,” she argues that Tebow’s “Celebrate Family, Celebrate Life” commercial proves he is one of the better things to happen to sports—far better than “Jim McMahon dropping his pants . . . in response to a question.” Fully cognizant of how her argument will be received by second-wave feminists, Jenkins leads with a pre-emptive strike: “I’ll spit this out quickly, before the armies of feminism try to gag me and strap electrodes to my forehead: Tim Tebow is one of the better things to happen to young women in some time” (“Tebow’s”). Connecting feminism to armies and torture tactics reinforces the image of militant, angry feminists. Anti-feminists have promulgated this image as far back as the suffrage fight (Wade). Political cartoons depicted first-wave feminists as manly, ugly, angry, emasculating, negligent mothers, who forced domestic duties on subservient husbands (Wade). The anti-feminist campaign championed this image throughout subsequent waves of feminism, leading to a

current desire to disassociate from feminism. Results from a 2013 HuffPost/YouGov poll reveals that while more than 80% of respondents believe “men and women should be social, political, and economic equals,” only 21% considered themselves feminist (“Top Lines”). The confounding contradiction between those supporting feminism’s main goal but avoiding the label can be partly blamed on anti-feminist campaigns. Residing in positions of power and privilege, anti-feminists resist the movement to upend oppressive forces that benefit them. However, there are other causes for the disconnect. These include feminism’s ineffective public messaging and, Jenkins’ main objection to NOW, the seemingly “lockstep” thinking of second-wave feminists.

As a journalist, Jenkins erects NOW as a foil because she views the organization as being singularly and militantly focused on reproductive rights. This focus presents NOW as suppressing more and varied concerns and keeping people from considering a wider scope of opinions, something Jenkins has deplored in other organizations and industries. Similar to her reasoning to keep Imus on the airwaves, Jenkins champions the Tebow ad because it can invite viewers to “think more deeply about the issues” (“Tebow’s”). For Jenkins, NOW’s response to pull the ad suggests that the organization is more pro-abortion than pro-choice: Tebow’s mother exercised her freedom of choice when her doctor suggested she undergo an abortion after she contracted a tropical ailment on a Christian mission in the Philippines. Jenkins levels blame at NOW for clamoring about the 30-second pro-life ad and not making a fuss over other ads that show “women in bikinis selling beer” (“Tebow’s”). Because of NOW’s uproar over the ad, Jenkins can degrade the organization for its public focus on reproductive rights and not on other sexist or oppressive ads. Jenkins’ assessment aligns with younger feminists’ reluctance to join NOW or, as Jenkins calls it, the “National Organization of Fewer and Fewer Women All the Time” (“Tebow’s”).

Jenkins’ basic argument that NOW is intolerant and militant works well for her journalism and her sports-audience, but it also glosses over some intricacies about the controversy--things that third-wave feminists would push to analyze. Jenkins slyly mentions

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that the ad was paid for by Focus on the Family, and she cites CBS's right to broadcast whatever advertisements it wants as a privately-owned corporation. This tacitly undermines the real reasons feminist organizations, NOW being only one, campaigned against the ad. According to Jehmu Greene, president of the New York-based Women's Media Center, protest over the ad was actually spurned by the conservative group's malignant anti-equality agenda and CBS's hypocritical policy to air this controversial ad but reject others by left-of-center organizations--MoveOn.org, PeTA, and the United Church of Christ ("Tebow Super Bowl"). Jenkins' reference to Focus on the Family does mention that the "group's former spokesman, James Dobson, says loathsome things about gays," but she does not connect NOW with this critique or the myriad problems surrounding the privilege of privately-owned media corporations ("Tebow's"). Jenkins does begin to remind readers that "abortion doesn't just involve the serious issues of life, but of potential lives," a move suggesting she might do the difficult work of dismantling the privilege associated with choice, but then she quickly derides NOW for its condemnation of the ad and releases CBS from any responsibility ("Tebow's"). Jenkins' journalistic skill keeps the article moving and focused on deriding NOW. Using NOW as a foil, Jenkins builds on her repertoire with her readership; she ends the article with the implication that NOW's request to pull the ad suggests that "we as a Super Bowl audience are too stupid or too disinterested to handle [such weighty issues] on game day" ("Tebow's"). Cleverly, Jenkins moves from the first-person to the second, and the "we" unties the author and audience against NOW in an exercise that begins to examine what choice means. When fully exercised, this analysis echoes legal scholar Kimberle Crenshaw's feminist notion of intersectionality. If Jenkins could get her readers to consider how gender, race, class, privilege, and power play out in pro-choice matters, then they could apply this analysis to the same intersections fostered by the sports industry.

Despite Jenkins' passionate arguments on issues concerning gender equality--and many other sports topics--she would most likely be bemused by a serious academic study of her relationship to feminism. Given that sarcasm and self-deprecating wit

are hallmarks of her journalism, she might enjoy the irony that her puckish jabs at early-wave feminism prompted a close inspection of her place in the movement. It is also fair to argue that, although her differences with second-wave feminism are real, the provocative contrasts she creates are as much for journalistic utility as any genuine desire to create dust-ups with feminist icons. After all, when addressing a mainstream audience not necessarily schooled in feminist history, Jenkins cannot effectively defend changes in the feminist movement (third wave and later) without reminding readers of its previous incarnation--even if “creaking old school feminists” might not be the most even-handed representation. However, even if second-wavers provide Jenkins with a convenient, pliable foil, few, if any, would ever doubt her commitment to the advancement of women in society. On this accord, it is useful to end this article as it began--Jenkins’ conversations with Pat Summitt about gender and sports. During this project, Summitt passed away on 28 June 2016, after a five-year battle with early-onset Alzheimer’s disease. A tragic loss to the sports world, her death was devastatingly personal for Jenkins. She wrote three books with Summitt, and Jenkins described her as “her closest friend.” Jenkins respected a great many things about her friend--one of which, to be sure, was the role Summitt played in changing the way the world viewed female athletes and how those athletes viewed themselves. This is a common thread in Jenkins’ books with Summitt and paints Summitt, if not as a “sign-carrier,” then certainly as a stealth force--and a powerful one--in the women’s movement. Equally common themes in Jenkins’ Summitt narratives are nuance and contradiction. After all, what could be more nuanced or contradictory, from a feminism perspective, than Summitt, who took pride in being a Southern lady, who cooked dinner every night for her family, all the while drastically changing the world of sports for women?

This nuance and contradiction directly compares with third- and fourth-wave feminist movements, seen at work during and after the 21 January 2017 Women’s March. What started as a Facebook status update from a Hawaiian woman launched into a protest attended by 3.7 million across the globe. The protest, like

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many aspects of the feminist movement, has endured much resentment, particularly from women of color, transwomen, sex workers, and pro-life feminists who viewed it as a largely cis-gendered, able-bodied, white-privileged protest, one that initially co-opted its name from the 1997 Million Women March. Many of these Women's March protestors did not participate in previous Black Lives Matter events. Other concerns included the perceived second-wave organizers' naïveté regarding third- or fourth-wave feminists' focus on intersectionality. One illustration of this was when the organizers of the Women's March in the tiny, predominantly white beachside town of New Smyrna Beach, Florida, banned the word *intersectionality* from signs or chants. Other banned terms included *Fascism*, *Trump*, and *Republicans* ("Women's March"). Regardless, these words, particularly intersectionality, were chanted all over the nation and painted on countless signs by a range of feminists. This small example shows that there is much work to be done in the feminist movement, but what seems like messy in-fighting is actually progress and reflects Jenkins' contrarian thinking--turning prevailing attitudes on their head and having difficult, nimble conversations with the opposing view. Jenkins' fraught relationship with second-wave feminists asks readers to move beyond a lock-step reaction that no longer serves today's far more inclusive, intersectional feminist landscape.

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Notes

1. For more information on third-wave feminism, see Kinser. Third-wave feminism consists of
a current era political body whose constituents practice a multiplicity of feminist ideologies and praxes while generally sharing the following characteristics: (1) They came to young adulthood as feminists; (2) They practice feminism in a schizophrenic cultural milieu which on one side grants that they have a right to improved opportunities, resources, and legislative support, and on the other side resists their politics which enable to them to lay claim to, embody, and hold onto same; (3) They embrace pluralistic thinking within feminism and work to undermine narrow visions of feminism and their consequent confinements, through in large part the

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significantly more prominent voice of 6 women of color and global feminism; (4) They live feminism in constant tension with postfeminism, though such tension often goes unnoticed as such.” (Kinser 133)

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