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## Backboards and Backlash: The Experiences of Women's Intercollegiate Basketball Players Under Title IX, 1975-1992

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts degree in History

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## **Abstract**

Enacted as a provision of the Education Amendments Act of 1972, Title IX dramatically reshaped intercollegiate athletics opportunities for young women at American institutions of higher education. Yet, discrimination in intercollegiate athletics continued in the decades after the law went into effect. Using the oral history testimony of ten narrators, each a woman who played intercollegiate basketball between 1975 and 1992, this thesis explores the experiences of women's basketball players in the first two decades after the passage of Title IX. Approaching the Title IX era through the lens of social history, this thesis asks two major questions: whether female athletes benefitted from Title IX's introduction, and how; and why inequity persisted in intercollegiate basketball under the law. While much of the literature to date has rendered verdicts on Title IX's success, this work finds that playing women's college basketball under Title IX was neither all good nor all bad.

## **Key Words**

Title IX, Basketball, American History, American Sport History, Intercollegiate Athletics, Oral History, Gender Equity, Backlash, Women's History.

## **Summary for Lay Audience**

Title IX, an American antidiscrimination law passed in 1972, dramatically reshaped intercollegiate athletics opportunities for young women at American colleges and universities. However, discrimination in intercollegiate athletics continued in the decades that followed. Using the oral history testimony of ten narrators, each a woman who played intercollegiate basketball between 1975 and 1992, this thesis explores the experiences of women's basketball players in the first two decades after the passage of Title IX. Approaching the Title IX era through the lens of social history, this thesis asks two major questions: whether female athletes benefitted from Title IX's introduction, and how; and why inequity persisted in intercollegiate basketball under the law. Though many have argued for Title IX as a good or bad law, this work finds that playing women's college basketball under Title IX was neither all good nor all bad.

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## List of Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Definition
AIAW	Association for Intercollegiate Athletics for Women
EMC	Eastern Montana College
HEW	United States Department of Health, Education, and Welfare
HBCU	Historically Black colleges and universities
LSU	Louisiana State University
NBA	National Basketball Association
NCAA	National Collegiate Athletic Association
<i>NYT</i>	<i>The New York Times</i>
OCR	Office of Civil Rights
<i>ODE</i>	<i>Oregon Daily Emerald</i>
PWI	Predominantly white institutions
SEC	Southeast Conference
<i>SI</i>	<i>Sports Illustrated</i>
TSU	Towson State University
UCSB	University of California Santa Barbara
USC	University of Southern California
UVA	University of Virginia
WBL	Women's Basketball League
WNBA	Women's National Basketball Association

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## Introduction

In 1977, Jennifer Scott received an athletics scholarship for women's basketball. Her scholarship, a full ride to the prestigious University of Virginia (UVA), was among the first granted to women basketball players in the United States. Four years prior, Scott could not have played basketball for UVA; the school did not have a women's team. In fact, before 1970, Scott's gender would have barred her from undergraduate admission at UVA altogether.<sup>1</sup> But in 1972, President Richard Nixon signed antidiscrimination legislation that promised a new future in education and athletics for young American women like Scott—a law that, according to Scott, impacted her experiences as a student-athlete in every way possible.<sup>2</sup> The Title IX era had begun.

Title IX rapidly reshaped athletics opportunities for young women at colleges and universities from coast-to-coast. Part of the Education Amendments Act of 1972, Title IX strictly forbade all federally funded educational institutions from discriminating “on the basis of sex.”<sup>3</sup> In other words, all educational institutions that received financial support from the federal government were required to provide women with the same opportunities available to men, from lecture halls to locker rooms and everywhere in between. Yet, despite its broad purpose, Title IX has become synonymous with the expansion of sporting opportunities for American women and girls.

Athletic prospects for women at America's institutions of higher education improved quickly and dramatically under Title IX. Nationwide, more women than ever participated in

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<sup>1</sup> The University of Virginia established its women's basketball program in 1974, two years after Title IX was signed into law. For a university that had only opened its doors to female undergraduates in 1970, Title IX's rule ensured UVA's move to integrate women in all areas of campus life was remarkably swift.

<sup>2</sup> Jennifer Scott requested that she not be directly quoted in this thesis. Her words have been paraphrased.

<sup>3</sup> Title IX, Education Amendments of 1972, 20 U.S.C. §§ 1681-1688.

intercollegiate sports. In 1971, approximately 32,000 women had played on college-level teams. This figure more than tripled by 1976, with 105,000 young women now participating in college athletics.<sup>4</sup> Many of these women played individual sports, like tennis, that had long been viewed as more “feminine” or “acceptable” for women.<sup>5</sup> But they also flocked towards team sports like basketball, a supposedly “masculine” game that would prove especially popular among college-aged women in the first two decades following Title IX’s passage.

While Title IX dramatically increased opportunities for play, there was nothing new about university-level women’s basketball. Young women had been shooting free throws from the foul lines of college courts since 1891. But the development of intercollegiate basketball programs for women was wholly unlike those for men. Many universities had already formed all-male varsity teams when the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) was founded near the turn of the century, contributing to the development of men’s basketball into one of America’s most popular and commercially successful sports, joining the ranks of baseball and football. Basketball was also popular among college-aged Victorian women, but women’s basketball remained an underfunded and unevenly played intramural pastime until the mid-twentieth century.<sup>6</sup> Still, young women passionately went courtside, hungry for the chance to participate in team athletics.

For eighty years, women’s college basketball was controlled by female physical educators. For much of this time, these educators’ main goal was to ensure that the game would be played in a way that adhered to traditional gender norms, which understood women as gentle and passive.<sup>7</sup> Senda Berenson, often referred to as the mother of women’s basketball, developed a set of rules

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<sup>4</sup> “Sex Discrimination and Intercollegiate Athletics: Putting Some Muscle on Title IX,” *The Yale Law Journal* 88, no. 6 (May 1979): p. 1254.

<sup>5</sup> Donna M. Miller, *Coaching the Female Athlete* (Philadelphia: Lea and Febinger, 1974), p. 6.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 51.

that would allow women to develop “alertness, accuracy, coolness and presence of mind under trying circumstances,” while preventing physical contact and rough play.<sup>8</sup> Berenson’s rules, meant to ensure that women who played basketball maintained their “femininity,” would remain in use until the 1960s.

As basketball grew in popularity throughout the early twentieth century, those controlling the women’s game laboured to prevent it from following the same path as men’s basketball. Women educators saw the increasingly commercial men’s game as a cooption of what they believed was the benefit and meaning of basketball participation. While women’s basketball was modelled to develop “physical and moral courage” and “a strong physique” in its participants, men’s basketball had become focused on intense competition and commercialization.<sup>9</sup> Seeing these purposes of the men’s game as incongruent with the goals of basketball participation for women, female physical educators remained steadfast in their enforcement of Berenson’s rules until the early 1960s, thereby protecting traditional gender norms.

In the 1960s, most American universities did not sponsor varsity women’s basketball teams, and female athletes and coaches encountered unequal access to facilities and limited financial support whether they participated in intramural or club programs.<sup>10</sup> But the tide was turning for women in America. The 1960s marked the beginning of a new Women’s Liberation

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<sup>8</sup> Senda Berenson, “The Significance of Basket Ball for Women,” in *Line Basketball for Women*, ed. Senda Berenson (New York: A.G. Spalding, 1901), p. 37

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Grundy and Shackelford, *Shattering the Glass: The Remarkable History of Women’s Basketball* (New York: The New Press, 2005), p. 200. Intramural sports are a form recreation for students enrolled at a college or university. These activities are typically open to any member of the student body, regardless of skill, and are focused on fun and exercise rather than competition. Club sports offer competitive, interuniversity play for college athletes, without the significant time commitment required to play highly competitive varsity sports. Like intramural athletics, club teams typically receive little to no financial support, requiring athletes to pay to play. However, club sports usually require athletes to tryout to make their rosters.

movement, seeing women attempt to break from the chains of misogyny and patriarchal control in all areas of society, from the home to the office to the classroom to the basketball court.

Athletics was entangled with the women's movement from the get-go. Feminists pushed for the passage of state Equal Rights Amendments, put forth legal battles over girls' participation in high school sports, and drove Title IX through Congress—a major legislative win amid the struggle to pass the federal Equal Rights Amendment.<sup>11</sup> While Title IX was not specifically focused on athletics, it did instantly engender a myriad of positive consequences for women's basketball and its athletes. As discussed, the law forced the adoption of athletic scholarships for women and the expansion of opportunities for competitive play, in turn improving the status and visibility of female athletes in the United States. Indeed, it was the women's movement that opened the doors for female athletes.

Still, some feminists were hesitant to outwardly embrace the world of sport. While some advocated for sporting opportunities for women and girls, many in the women's movement regarded athletics as an embodiment of patriarchal society's veneration of competitiveness, ruthlessness, and masculine gender norms.<sup>12</sup> The women leading intercollegiate teams and athletics departments likewise tried to distance themselves from feminism in an attempt to avoid the backlash towards women's libbers.

By the 1980s, a powerful counterassault had emerged in opposition to the rights women had secured during the previous decade. As journalist Susan Faludi explained, this backlash was not produced by “women's full achievement of equality but by the increased possibility that they

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<sup>11</sup> Hollis Elkins, “Time for a Change: Women's Athletics and the Women's Movement,” *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 3, no. 1 (Spring 1978): p. 24.

<sup>12</sup> Kelly Belanger, *Invisible Seasons: Title IX and the Fight for Equity in College Sports* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2016), p. 19.

might win it.”<sup>13</sup> In this context, backlash refers to an adverse reaction in response to social and political developments. Because backlashes are deeply linked to the status quo, often driven by the majority groups’ fear of losing power or privilege, any law designed to promote equality is susceptible to counterattack. Title IX undeniably fell under this umbrella and quickly became a target of the antifeminist movement. Female athletes and coaches were a target of the antifeminist backlash, seen as violating societal gender norms because of their participation in sports, a traditionally masculine domain. In 1980, Christine Grant, a founding member of the Association for Intercollegiate Athletics for Women (AIAW), said that speaking on behalf of equal opportunity often resulted in female coaches and athletics officials called “man-hater or lesbian” by men in an effort “to silence them.”<sup>14</sup> To cope, some women adopted apologetic rhetorics and emphasized their conventionality or femininity to maintain social acceptability and to mitigate the backlash they confronted.<sup>15</sup>

Women’s sports and women athletes also faced a backlash in the political sphere. Almost immediately, the NCAA became an outspoken critic of Title IX, with the organization’s executive director, Walter Byers, publicly arguing that the law heralded “impending doom” for men’s collegiate sports.<sup>16</sup> Financial repercussions were the NCAA’s chief concern. The organization believed that spending equally on men’s and women’s sports would be “disruptive...destructive, and surely counter-productive” to the functioning of college athletics departments.<sup>17</sup> Accordingly,

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<sup>13</sup> Susan Faludi, *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 1991), pp. 9-14.

<sup>14</sup> Christine Grant, “Liberty, Equality and Sorority,” speech, AIAW, Region 9 Delegate Assembly, 1980, transcript, in Christine Grant Papers, Iowa Women’s Archives, University of Iowa Libraries, Iowa City, IA.

<sup>15</sup> Mary Jo Festle, *Playing Nice: Politics and Apologies in Women’s Sports* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), pp. 45-52.

<sup>16</sup> Andrew Crichton, “Scorecard,” *Sports Illustrated* 41, no. 1 (July 1, 1974), p. 11.

<sup>17</sup> “HEW Regulations Threaten College Athletics,” *NCAA News* 11, no. 3 (March 1, 1974): p. 2.

the organization launched a campaign to undermine the implementation and enforcement of Title IX.

Was the NCAA correct? Did the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare's (HEW) guidelines for Title IX compliance require colleges and universities to spend equally, provide separate and equal facilities, or award athletic scholarships uniformly? According to those responsible for enforcing Title IX, the answer was no. In 1975, the Director of the Office of Civil Rights (OCR), Peter H. Holmes, insisted that compliance with Title IX for post-secondary schools did not necessitate equal spending on men's and women's programs or the implementation of quota systems that limited the number of male athletes.<sup>18</sup> The law simply required institutions to meet three criteria related to sports, which each placed equity over equality. First, intercollegiate athletics departments had to provide opportunities for women and men at rates proportionate to their enrolment. Colleges and universities also needed to conduct continued program expansion for the underrepresented gender, female or male. Finally, post-secondary schools were required to fully accommodate the underrepresented gender by offering viability and sufficient competition for every team that had enough interest.<sup>19</sup> Still, the NCAA launched an unrelenting lobbying effort to undermine the implementation of HEW's Title IX regulations, pushing the idea that the expansion of women's sports would be detrimental to "real" college athletes: men.

Eventually, the NCAA gave up its crusade, recognizing that Congress would not wholly gut Title IX's jurisdiction over intercollegiate sports. But the organization did not completely give up its fight and turned its attention towards usurping control of women's intercollegiate athletics. The AIAW had been the authority on women's college athletics since 1971, governing the

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<sup>18</sup> HEW/OCR, "Memorandum to Chief State Officers, Superintendents of Local Educational Agencies and College and University Presidents," *Government Publications*, Washington D.C. (September 1975).

<sup>19</sup> HEW/OCR, "A Policy Interpretation: Title IX and Intercollegiate Athletics," in *Equal Play*, eds. Nancy Hogshead-Makar and Andrew Zimbalist, p. 67-83.

programs at every post-secondary institution that offered sports for its female students. But once the NCAA began offering women's championships in 1982, the AIAW quickly crumbled, taking female control over women's sports down with it.<sup>20</sup> No longer did the NCAA have to fight Title IX in the political arena—it could now influence Title IX compliance from the inside, still using its power to protect the exalted status of men's athletics in the intercollegiate landscape.

Despite the more liberated state of women in America, and the rising status and acceptance of women athletes, sportswomen continued to be perceived by many as a threat to men and their supremacy in American sports and to status quo gender norms during the Title IX era. As will be shown in chapter two, the NCAA's view of women's sports as somehow harmful to men's programs—that the expansion of sporting opportunities for women would result in budget deficits and the cutting of male sports like wrestling or baseball—was spread in national and campus media. Female athletes also experienced social discrimination. Allison Heisch remarked in 1990 that “even in an era of supposed liberation, female athleticism continues to carry with it the stigma of sexual deviance.”<sup>21</sup> Indeed, female athletes were seen as contravening the norms of “femininity” that basketball's founders had endeavored to protect, and labelled as lesbians or as unfeminine for their display of “male” traits like aggression, discipline, and competition.<sup>22</sup> These attitudes, alongside the NCAA's lobbying efforts and takeover of women's athletics, meant men's sports would continue to receive more attention and financial support from officials, fans, and the media than their female counterparts, despite Title IX's mandate.

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<sup>20</sup> Mark Betchel, “AIAW vs. NCAA: When Women's College Basketball Had to Choose,” *Sports Illustrated* (June 14, 2022), <https://www.si.com/college/2022/06/14/aiaw-ncaa-womens-college-basketball-league-title-ix-daily-cover>.

<sup>21</sup> Allison Heisch, “Ruling Women Out,” in *The Women's Review of Books* 7, no. 5 (February 1990): p. 23.

<sup>22</sup> Elkins, “Time for a Change,” p. 22.



The backlash to Title IX was similar to those of other major, status-quo-shaking laws and legal decisions in American history. After the Supreme Court ruled in favour of desegregation in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* (1954), a fierce, violent white resistance arose to protect status quo race relations. Likewise, the Court’s decision to protect abortion in 1973’s *Roe v. Wade* engendered a counterresponse from the antifeminist movement, a nearly fifty-year backlash that successfully overturned the decision in 2022. Laws like Title IX and rulings like *Brown* and *Roe* themselves are not the problem—these laws and decisions are meant to protect marginalized communities against the forces of sexism and racism, and they have successfully improved conditions for millions of Americans. The real problem is the power of the forces these laws intend to counter. It is the widespread desire to maintain a white, heteronormative, patriarchal status quo that inhibits genuine change, not the laws and rulings that attempt to restore equality and equity.

By the early 1990s, women’s basketball resembled the men’s game much more than the model originally engineered by Berenson. The games shared practically identical rules, and women’s basketball was rapidly growing in popularity and profitability. Yet two things had not fully changed. For one, women’s basketball players continued to be taught the same lessons in character that had been designed by game’s pioneers. Moreover, inequity persisted in women’s basketball. As University of Washington coach Chris Gobrecht remarked in 1990, “the battle isn’t completely won yet.”<sup>23</sup> Women’s basketball and its athletes remained far from achieving full social and economic equity with the men’s game, despite Title IX’s protection.

To understand women’s basketball players’ experiences during the first two decades under Title IX, it is crucial to establish a distinction between Title IX as a *law* and Title IX as an *historical moment*. Much of the existing literature on Title IX and intercollegiate sports has tended to render

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<sup>23</sup> Craig Neff, “Back to Life,” *Sports Illustrated* 72, no. 16 (April 16, 1990): p. 16.

verdicts, positive and negative, on the law itself, but this study suggests that this approach is not necessary to understand Title IX's impact on female athletes. Approaching the Title IX era through the lens of social history, this thesis asks two major questions: whether female athletes benefitted from Title IX's introduction, and how; and why inequity persisted in intercollegiate basketball under the law. Ultimately, it finds that between 1975 and 1992, playing women's college basketball under Title IX was neither all good nor all bad. There were several ways in which women's basketball players were benefitted by the creation and expansion of opportunities for intercollegiate play under Title IX, but these athletes also encountered financial inequities and social discrimination caused by an antifeminist backlash to the law.

### **Historiography**

Title IX and women's athletics has been broadly written about in both academic and popular discourse, though women's intercollegiate basketball has received less attention than sports like soccer and tennis. Sociologists, economists, and legal experts have thus far dominated the scholarly debate on Title IX and intercollegiate sports, with historians having scarcely weighed in on the topic. Still, most of the conversation on women's sports and Title IX has taken place in the popular domain.

Scholars outside of the historical discipline have thus far led the academic conversation on Title IX and women's athletics. In 2007, economist Andrew Zimbalist and lawyer Nancy Hogshead-Makar published *Equal Play: Title IX and Social Change*, a documentary reader featuring many of the key primary sources from the Title IX era, such as HEW's 1975 Title IX Regulations, the 1979 Policy Interpretation, and several speeches made by Senator Birch Bayh. In it, the authors developed a discussion on the history of women in sports, demonstrating how

government actions can shape and support gender equity.<sup>24</sup> The book carried readers through the issues that have arisen under Title IX's rule, from the rise in sexual assault to the decrease in female coaches, but it did not delve deeply into the specific causes of these issues. While *Equal Play* is a valuable resource for understanding Title IX's impact on intercollegiate athletics, it is a documentary reader and thereby does not provide an in-depth analysis of the underlying factors that contributed to the persistent inequity and discrimination observable in women's college basketball between 1975 and 1992. This thesis builds on Hogshead-Makar and Zimbalist's work, using women's basketball to delve more deeply into the causes of inequity under Title IX.

One of the most notable legal works on Title IX and women's intercollegiate sports was written by Deborah Brake, a professor of law at the University of Pittsburgh. 2010's *Getting in the Game: Title IX and the Women's Sports Revolution* applied a feminist lens to assess Title IX's successes and shortcomings in relation to girls' and women's athletics. Brake found that Title IX has been "effective in changing cultural norms to support greater opportunities for girls and women in sports," despite being threatened by an anti-Title IX movement since it was introduced.<sup>25</sup> While Brake's work addressed the backlash, it focused on "how little" the counterassault to Title IX accomplished in a legal sense.<sup>26</sup> To make this argument, Brake relied almost exclusively on aggregate data, legal documents, and feminist theory, with little attention paid to the voices of women who have played college-level sports under Title IX's mandate. So, while *Getting in the Game* made a compelling case for the legal resilience of Title IX, the book left room for an analysis of the backlash's social impact on female athletes.

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<sup>24</sup> Nancy Hogshead-Makar and Andrew Zimbalist, *Equal Play: Title IX and Social Change* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2007), p. 3-4.

<sup>25</sup> Deborah Brake, *Getting in the Game: Title IX and the Women's Sports Revolution* (New York: New York University Press, 2010), p. 13.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

Historians have published little about Title IX's impact on women's college-level sports and even less on female intercollegiate basketball players. Pamela Grundy and Susan Shackelford did publish *Shattering the Glass: The Remarkable History of Women's Basketball* in 2005. The authors explored basketball's growth from its creation in 1891 to the founding of the WNBA in 1996, demonstrating that women's basketball, though a vibrant and important part of American sport history, has long been overlooked in favour of the men's game. The authors showed how the history of women's basketball informed why efforts to promote gender equity in athletics must continue today, addressing that the opposition to Title IX has worked to block "true equality."<sup>27</sup> Still, while *Shattering the Glass* does touch upon basketball during the early Title IX era, it is primarily a survey. Room remains for further exploration of women's basketball under Title IX, and the impact of the post-Title IX backlash on the sports' athletes.

One of the few historical works that centres Title IX and college-level basketball is Kelly Belanger's *Invisible Seasons: Title IX and the Fight for Equity in College Sports*, published in 2016. Belanger focused on the efforts of Michigan State University's women's squad to combat sex discrimination during the 1970s, arguing that a shift in focus from "equality" to "equity" during Title IX's first decade shaped "rich rhetorical resources that women's sports advocates today must employ to continue moving towards equality."<sup>28</sup> While *Invisible Seasons* centred the voices of sportswomen, using oral history as evidence in its analysis, Belanger was chiefly concerned with the sex discrimination these athletes confronted and how they employed Title IX to fight against it. Her work barely addressed the backlash to Title IX, despite touching upon similar topics discussed in this thesis. *Invisible Seasons* began the historical conversation focused specifically on Title IX and women's basketball, but provided space for further analysis into the causes of female

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<sup>27</sup> Grundy and Shackelford, *Shattering the Glass*, p. 394.

<sup>28</sup> Belanger, *Invisible Seasons*, p. 5.

athletes' experiences with inequity and discrimination under the law's mandate and how they benefitted despite these difficulties.

Journalists and writers have thus far dominated the extensive pool of popular discourse on Title IX and intercollegiate athletics. In 1992, Jessica Gavora, a conservative writer, speechwriter, and former policy advisor for the U.S. Department of Justice, published *Tilting the Playing Field: Schools, Sports, Sex and Title IX*, a fierce polemic about Title IX's "destruction" of intercollegiate sports. Gavora argued that the enforcement of Title IX has had unintended negative consequences for male athletes and their athletics programs, unfairly reducing their opportunities under the guise of gender parity.<sup>29</sup> But the premise of Gavora's work is flawed. For one, her characterization of Title IX as a "quota" law—that it discriminates against male athletes and *requires* cutting their programs in favour of new ones for women—disregards that the legislation simply required institutions to provide equity for the underrepresented gender, whether that be women *or* men. Gavora also suggested that other writers, by exclusively discussing the benefits seen under Title IX, have transformed female athletes into "the welfare queens of the sports world."<sup>30</sup> Yet, this language is Gavora's, not that of other writers. *She* is the one perpetuating a negative narrative of Title IX by falsely claiming that the law forced the destruction of men's athletics programs, but also by defaming the female athletes who benefitted from the law. Still, Gavora's critique does allude to an interesting point: public discourse has largely failed to demonstrate a complicated narrative of Title IX. Rather, the law has been lauded for creating athletics opportunities for women or lambasted as tremendously problematic for male athletes.

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<sup>29</sup> Jessica Gavora, *Tilting the Playing Field: Schools, Sports, Sex and Title IX* (San Francisco: Encounter Books, 2002), p. 6.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid*, p. 5.

Welch Suggs' *A Place on the Team: The Triumph and Tragedy of Title IX*, published in 2006, added a new dimension to the public debate on Title IX and women's sports. Though not discussing women's basketball specifically, Suggs, a professor of journalism at the University of Georgia, laid out a case for how women's sports were both helped and hindered by Title IX. For Suggs, the "tragedy" of Title IX is that female athletes and their coaches have become "wrapped up in the high-stakes, highly commercialized model of men's sport," forgetting about the abstract goals of sport participation, such as leadership, teamwork, and determination.<sup>31</sup> Yet, his work does not utilize evidence that centres the voices of female athletes and thereby overlooks how the young women playing sports under Title IX felt about the shift to a more competitive model. Chapter Three engages directly with Suggs' argument, using the oral history testimony of women's basketball players to paint a parallel image of Title IX's supposed tragedy.

Journalists have also published works that focus specifically on the history of women's basketball. In 2000, Joanne Lannin, who served as the *Portland Press Herald's* first female sportswriter, published *A History of Basketball for Girls and Women: From Bloomers to Big Leagues*. Lannin's work traced the development of women's basketball, revealing the obstacles women encountered in their efforts to play and coach the game, such as limited funding and discrimination from male coaches and athletes. Lannin emphasized that basketball has served as a means of empowerment and self-expression for young women, and as a way for them to challenge gender norms.<sup>32</sup> But, much like Grundy & Shackelford's *Shattering the Glass*, Lannin's work was a historical survey that did not deeply delve into the experiences of female athletes under Title IX. Moreover, while Lannin drew upon anecdotes from her own time playing and coaching basketball,

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<sup>31</sup> Welch Suggs, *A Place on the Team: The Triumph and Tragedy of Title IX* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), p. 10.

<sup>32</sup> Joanne Lannin, *A History of Basketball for Girls and Women: From Bloomers to Big Leagues* (Minneapolis, MN: Lerner Sports, 2000).

her narrative centred “key figures” in the game’s development rather than the voices of ordinary women. While this approach is useful, as it is necessary to understand how basketball evolved and who was involved in these changes, focusing only on exceptional cases shapes a story that may not reflect how the average athlete—that is, the women who were not receiving national media attention or were not at the front of Title IX lawsuits—experienced intercollegiate athletics. While Lannin’s work provides useful historical context about women’s basketball, it left a need to study the voices of ordinary women playing basketball under Title IX.

Historical and other scholarly discussions of Title IX have recognized the impact of a backlash on the law’s ability to effect real change. Yet, due to their nature as historical surveys or documentary readers, these studies have addressed this point briefly and have not deeply explored the specific impacts that the backlash had on female athletes. Works like Belanger’s have explored women’s basketball under Title IX’s mandate in more detail but did so to expose how athletes used the law to combat sex discrimination rather than exploring why that discrimination persisted and how it impacted young women. This thesis, therefore, builds on the works of Hogshead-Makar and Zimbalist, Grundy and Shackelford, and Belanger, offering an analysis of how female hoopers were impacted by the backlash to Title IX between 1975 and 1992.

The non-historical scholarship and popular publications share several similarities, reflective of broader trends in the scholarship on Title IX and intercollegiate athletics. First, while including brief historical overviews, most treat Title IX and women’s sport as a legal debate or public policy issue, rather than approaching it as social history. These are both reasonable approaches. However, this thesis is specifically interested in examining Title IX through the lens of social history. Second, many of the academic and popular works on the subject have addressed Title IX’s wide-reaching impact on girls’ and women’s sports in America—from childhood to

adulthood—rather than just college athletics, with most spanning from 1972 to the present instead of focusing on a specific decade or period. Finally, most of these works pulled their evidence from sources that excluded or overlooked athletes’ perspectives. Ultimately, much of the literature to date has tended to disregard the voices and lived experiences of women athletes in the age of Title IX.

This thesis focuses on women’s college basketball between 1975 and 1992.<sup>33</sup> Basketball was chosen as a case study to understand the experiences of female athletes under Title IX for several reasons. Firstly, during the 1970s and 1980s, basketball was the most widely played intercollegiate team sport among women, meaning the athletes on these teams were among the first to benefit from Title IX’s protections and to feel the backlash’s repercussions. Secondly, as previously discussed, basketball had long been associated with masculinity, meaning that women who played the game were more likely to have endured some level of social discrimination due to their apparent “contravention” of societal gender norms. Finally, women’s basketball is now the most profitable and visible intercollegiate sport played by women, and the game represents female athletes of many different backgrounds in terms of race, sexuality, and socioeconomic status. The impact of Title IX and its backlash on women’s basketball, then, is likely to provide some clues about how women who played other sports at the college level were impacted by the law.

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<sup>33</sup> This date range was selected based on several criteria. In 1975, the first scholarships for women’s basketball were granted, marking the beginning of Title IX’s impact on the game’s athletes. Moreover, in 1975, the Department of Health, Education, and Wellness released its final Title IX regulations, meaning that institutions understood the expectations of compliance with the law. The study ends in 1992, when the U.S. Supreme Court unanimously ruled in *Franklin v. Gwinnett County Public Schools* that students subjected to sexual harassment and violence could sue for monetary damages under Title IX. This ruling fundamentally reshaped the climate of intercollegiate athletics and Title IX enforcement, ensuring that the years that followed looked different than the seventeen years covered by this study.



## Methods

To understand how Title IX shaped the experiences of women's intercollegiate basketball players in the first two decades following its passage, I have drawn from a variety of sources, including evidence from campus and national newspapers; university yearbooks; mass-circulated publications like *Sports Illustrated*; congressional records; and the writings of professionals within the fields of physical education and coaching. I also conducted oral history interviews, in which ten self-identifying female narrators responded to questions about their experiences playing university-level basketball at any time between 1975 and 1992.<sup>34</sup>

Oral history was selected because there is a dearth of primary sources produced by, or from the perspective of, women's basketball players from this period. The oral history testimonies provide valuable insights into how Title IX affected the lives of young women playing basketball in the first twenty years of its mandate; women who played on different teams across the nation, from Alabama to Oregon, and are of varying backgrounds. This focus is intended to measure Title IX's success not by its effects on men—which is often presumed to be negative—but by its meaning for the young women whose equitable treatment it was intended to ensure. This thesis asks whether women athletes benefitted from the introduction of Title IX, and how. Others have already assessed how well American college and universities did or did not fulfill the requirements of the law, and how athletics administrations and male athletes reacted or were affected. We are long overdue for some assessment of the law's specific effects on young women athletes.

The narrators had varying backgrounds and identities. Seven identified as white/Caucasian. Three identified as Black; one as Latinx and two as African American. This diversity roughly

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<sup>34</sup> Ten is the recommended minimum for oral history research and is a reasonable number for a master's thesis of this size. The temporal bounds, 1975 to 1992, of this study was selected based on when the narrators played basketball, with the first's college career beginning in 1975 and the last's playing time ending in 1992.

represents the racial makeup of women's intercollegiate basketball players during this period, though it does not account for women of other racial and ethnic backgrounds who were dribbling basketballs alongside them in college gymnasiums.<sup>35</sup> Though not asked about their sexual identity, one of the narrators openly identified as lesbian; others discussed their husbands or former boyfriends, thereby revealing information about their heterosexuality. The narrators were also not directly asked about their socioeconomic status, though some did allude to their class during their interview.<sup>36</sup>

The narrators played under several governing bodies and at multiple levels of competition. Most competed within the NCAA after it usurped control of women's sports from the AIAW. Only two participated strictly under the AIAW's regulations; another had her career divided between the women's-only organization and the NCAA. One narrator's playing career was regulated by the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA), a much smaller organization than the NCAA that has sponsored both men's and women's sports since 1980.<sup>37</sup> The level of competition varied somewhat, too. While most of the narrators participated in Division I programs, the highest level of intercollegiate athletics under any governing body, two women were on Division II rosters and one competed at the Division III level. One might expect women basketball players under different associations and at different levels of intercollegiate competition to have had utterly

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<sup>35</sup> The AIAW did not collect and publish comprehensive data on the race and ethnicity of its athletes. Prior to 1999, the NCAA did not collect and publish comprehensive data on the racial and ethnic backgrounds of student-athletes. It is known that about sixty-five percent of women's basketball players were white. Yet, to truly get a read of women's college basketball's racial diversity between 1972 and 1992, one must look at the team photos available in yearbooks. These photos suggest that the game was dominated by white athletes and coaches during the 1970s and 1980s, though Black women and women of other racial backgrounds also participated in the game.

<sup>36</sup> See Appendices B and C for the full list of interview questions.

<sup>37</sup> The NAIA does not make its data or governing documents publicly available, whereas the NCAA's documents are easily accessible. Resultingly, this thesis mostly employs NCAA data and information for its analysis. This approach is reasonable seeing that there were roughly eighty-seven NAIA teams between 1980 and 1992 compared to over 700 NCAA squads during the same period. Still, it is necessary to recognize that some women's basketball players did not play under the NCAA's rules.

different experiences. Yet, regardless of where they played, the narrators recounted similar experiences of financial inequity and social discrimination related to athletics. These women also expressed deep senses of appreciation for the opportunities Title IX provided; gratitude that indicates why playing intercollegiate basketball, despite the negative reactions to their growing presence in college gymnasiums, was valuable to them as young women and, in many cases, still is today.

Several things are worth noting about the oral history testimonies. First, oral histories exhibit elements of both primary and secondary material. Oral testimonies are secondary retellings of firsthand experiences. In other words, they are how a narrator remembers a lived experience and should not be seen as primary accounts in the traditional sense. Second, oral histories, like all primary sources, are subjective. They are impacted by the narrator's personal beliefs, feelings, and experiences, but also by a collective social memory. In the case of this thesis, the popular American memory of Title IX as a net positive for women and girls will have undoubtedly influenced how the narrators recounted their experiences from over thirty years ago.

Moreover, the oral histories are not employed to suggest that the young women who played intercollegiate basketball between 1975 and 1992 shared identical experiences. There is not a "generic" sportswoman; the experiences of women athletes are vast and often dissimilar, which is revealed by the ten testimonies.<sup>38</sup> While each narrator faced some level of economic inequity and social discrimination as intercollegiate athletes, this discrimination was experienced in a myriad of ways—and at varying degrees—depending on the sexuality, class, and race of each narrator.

What follows is an attempt to paint a more complicated image of Title IX's impact on female intercollegiate athletes. The public obsession with classifying the legislation as either

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<sup>38</sup> Alison Dewar, "Would All the Generic Women in Sport Please Stand Up? Challenges Facing Feminist Sport Sociology," *Quest* 45, no. 2 (1993): p. 212.

beneficial or harmful—good or bad—has prevented us from recognizing a more nuanced understanding. Title IX itself did not cause damage, but the misogynistic political and social backlash that the law provoked certainly did. As this thesis will show, the actions and views of organizations and individuals, and the shortcomings of federal agencies, led to the bulk of inequity and discrimination during the first twenty years of Title IX’s mandate, not the legislation itself. Still, Title IX, which, in a legal sense, had an undeniably positive impact on women’s college sports, and the misogynistic, antifeminist backlash to it were undeniably intertwined; the backlash would not have risen without the law’s passage, and the law would not have been necessary without ongoing misogyny in American sports and society. Understanding this entanglement draws a picture of the early Title IX era that is neither outright good nor bad. Instead, during the first twenty years of Title IX’s protection, women’s basketball players simultaneously had positive and negative experiences in intercollegiate athletics.

This thesis explores the experiences of women’s intercollegiate basketball players between 1975 and 1992, finding that the backlash to Title IX ensured inequity would persist past 1972, and created negative economic and social consequences for female athletes. Yet women who played basketball during this period also insisted that, despite the discrimination they faced, playing competitively in college was a valuable experience that profoundly shaped their lives in the short and long-term. Chapter One shows how the political backlash to Title IX sustained a climate of economic inequity in women’s basketball during the 1970s and 1980s. Chapter Two details the social dimensions of the backlash to women’s athletics, highlighting several forms of social discrimination confronted by female basketball players during this period. Chapter Three addresses Title IX’s positive impact on these athletes, despite the backlash. The thesis concludes

that, despite facing discrimination, the women playing intercollegiate basketball between 1975 and 1992 profoundly benefitted from the law.

## **Chapter One: The Political Backlash to Title IX and Supportive Discouragement in Women’s College Basketball**

Reflecting on her time playing intercollegiate basketball in Oregon during the early 1980s, Kim Hayashi remembered that the school’s athletics administration regarded women athletes as “a necessary evil” and “a drain on school finances.”<sup>39</sup> Hayashi’s institution fell under Title IX’s jurisdiction and was thereby required to comply with the law’s regulations. But according to Hayashi, her athletics administration acted slowly and reluctantly to provide women with equitable sporting opportunities. As a result, Hayashi and her teammates continued to feel economic inequities despite Title IX’s mandate.

Hayashi’s experience was far from unique. In the twenty years following Title IX’s enactment, women’s basketball players at post-secondary schools nationwide continued to face financial inequity in athletics. Despite the law’s directive for gender equity, these athletes were subject to the consequences shaped by a powerful backlash against Title IX. This backlash, led by male college coaches, officials, and athletics administrators, successfully weakened Title IX and its enforcement, perpetuating a culture of subtle sex discrimination. Consequently, women basketball players experienced what sociologists Nijole Benokraitis and Joe Feagin have called “supportive discouragement,” in which they were outwardly encouraged to partake in college sports but held back from meaningful participation due to inadequate resources and financial support.<sup>40</sup>

This chapter delves into the economic inequity that persisted in women’s intercollegiate basketball during this period despite Title IX’s regulations. It first addresses the political backlash

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<sup>39</sup> Kim Hayashi, interview by Meredyth Dwyer, July 13, 2022, interview 2, transcript, University of Western Ontario Department of History collection, p. 13.

<sup>40</sup> Nijole V. Benokraitis and Joe R. Feagin, *Modern Sexism: Blatant, Subtle, and Covert Discrimination* (Prentice Hall, 1989), p. 86.

to Title IX, which produced an environment in which funding-related discrimination could continue. The chapter then provides specific examples of the economic disparities felt by women who played basketball, illustrating how the abovementioned forces coalesced to create a climate of “supportive discouragement” in college sports. Finally, this chapter discusses the ways that these athletes coped with the financial inequity they encountered, revealing several tactics that they employed.

### **Political Backlash to Title IX**

On May 20, 1974, Senator John Tower outlined the “grave concern” that Title IX “will undercut revenue-producing sports programs and damage the overall sports programs of education institutions” to his colleagues.<sup>41</sup> The “grave concern” was not Tower’s. Rather, the senator spoke on behalf of a male-dominated intercollegiate sports establishment—administrators, coaches, and officials—that believed expanding women’s college sports would have major repercussions for men’s athletics programs. This fear would drive a powerful political backlash to Title IX, a backlash that had undesirable financial consequences for female athletes.

The National Collegiate Athletic Association, college athletics’ largest governing body, publicly fronted the backlash to Title IX, lobbying Congress to gut the law as it related to intercollegiate athletics. In 1974, the NCAA launched its first and strongest attempt to weaken Title IX. Believing the law would have severe financial consequences for men’s collegiate sports, the organization used its power to recommend an amendment to Title IX that would have gutted its application to college sports. The proposed Tower Amendment suggested that intercollegiate

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<sup>41</sup> Statement by Senator Tower, *Congressional Record*, Proceedings and Debates of the 94<sup>th</sup> Congress, First Session, (May 20, 1974).

athletics be entirely removed from Title IX’s jurisdictional scope or, failing that, that revenue-generating sports like football and men’s basketball be exempted from compliance.<sup>42</sup>

Congress rejected the Tower Amendment, but the NCAA’s lobbying efforts to weaken Title IX were still somewhat successful. Just two months after rejecting Tower’s proposal, Congress approved a similar revision to the law: the Javits Amendment. Javits did not go as far as the NCAA-backed Tower Amendment would have gone, but it did require that the final Title IX regulations include “reasonable provisions considering the nature of particular sports.”<sup>43</sup> In effect, Javits gave college athletics departments permission to inequitably fund certain men’s teams, specifically highly popular and profitable sports like football and men’s basketball, so long as they did not “limit the potential” for women’s sports to grow.<sup>44</sup> Though passing the Javits Amendment instead of Tower’s proposal demonstrated some commitment to gender equity in athletics, the amendment ultimately weakened Title IX and allowed real financial inequity to persist.

Once it became clear that Congress would not eliminate Title IX’s jurisdiction over intercollegiate sports, the NCAA shifted its efforts towards usurping control of women’s college athletics from the Association for Intercollegiate Athletics for Women (AIAW). During the 1980-81 academic year, the NCAA organized its first women’s national championships in twelve sports, including basketball, providing a better-funded alternative to the championships overseen by the AIAW. The NCAA made each of its member institutions, which had women’s programs governed by the AIAW, automatically eligible for these championships, promising there would not be an increase in membership dues.<sup>45</sup> In 1982, the NCAA offered its first Division I tournaments, seeing

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<sup>42</sup> Ellen J. Staurowsky, “Title IX and College Sport: The Long Painful Path to Compliance and Reform,” *Marquette Sports Law Review* 14, no. 1 (Fall 2003): pp. 100-101.

<sup>43</sup> Sen. Conf. Rep. No. 1026, 93rd Cong., 2nd Sess. 4271 (1974).

<sup>44</sup> 44 Fed. Reg. 71,413, 71,423 (1979), <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/t9interp.html>.

<sup>45</sup> Op. Cit., “Pretrial Brief AIAW vs. NCAA, August 1982,” (August 23, 1982), pp. 62, 13.



thirty-two AIAW basketball squads, including top teams like Louisiana Tech, Tennessee, and Auburn, participate, effectively signing the beginning of the end for the women's association.<sup>46</sup> The AIAW permanently closed its doors following the 1982 championship tournaments, having lost many of its members to the NCAA as well as its television broadcasting deal with NBC.<sup>47</sup> As a result, the bulk of decision-making for women's intercollegiate was surrendered to the male-dominated NCAA. Once men had control of women's sports programs, they refused to provide women with equitable funding and access to resources. By taking over women's sports, the NCAA no longer needed to fight Title IX in the political arena. Instead, the organization could now influence how the legislation was implemented from the inside, contributing to the persistent inequitable treatment of female athletes.

As the NCAA led the public fight over how Title IX should be interpreted, the men controlling collegiate athletics departments quietly undermined the law from within their institutions. The male college coaches and athletics directors at the helm of American intercollegiate sports slyly resisted Title IX's regulations. As Patricia "PJ" Moore, a member of the University of California Santa Barbara's (UCSB) basketball team from 1979-83, remarked, equitable funding for women's sports was "really slow to get started."<sup>48</sup> Financial considerations were the primary reason for the slow and reluctant response to Title IX within many of America's college athletics departments, with many fearing that adhering with the law's regulations would financially "plague" athletics departments and lead to deficits in their budgets.<sup>49</sup> Athletic directors were particularly protective of their revenue-generating programs—football and men's basketball,

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<sup>46</sup> "1982 Women's College Basketball NCAA Tournament," NCAA Tournaments, Sports Reference, accessed June 14, 2023, <https://www.sports-reference.com/cbb/postseason/women/1982-ncaa.html>.

<sup>47</sup> Betchel, "AIAW vs. NCAA."

<sup>48</sup> Patricia Moore, interview by Meredyth Dwyer, July 14, 2022, interview two, transcript, University of Western Ontario Department of History collection, p. 5.

<sup>49</sup> Barbe Lamb, "Title IX plagues Ducks," *Oregon Daily Emerald* 82, no. 17 (September 23, 1980): p. 19.

and were reluctant to reallocate funds to women's sports fearing a "loss of revenue."<sup>50</sup> These financial considerations restrained how male athletics administrators responded to Title IX's mandate, and their resistance to comply delayed equitable treatment for female athletes.

Resisting compliance with Title IX would not have been possible if the law had been aggressively enforced. While the simple threat of a review by the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare's (HEW) Office of Civil Rights (OCR), the federal agency responsible for enforcing Title IX, had sometimes been enough to rouse colleges to enhance their treatment of female athletes, it quickly became clear that the agency did not have the means to adequately respond to complaints and investigate allegedly non-compliant programs.<sup>51</sup> By 1975, Senator Birch Bayh lamented that the OCR was "deluged with cases" and that regional offices were "openly refusing to handle individual complaints." Yet the Office had not requested more funding to increase enforcement and investigative personnel.<sup>52</sup> In the same year, HEW announced that the OCR would no longer investigate every individual Title IX complaint due to the agency's chronic underfunding and understaffing.<sup>53</sup> Instead, the department's OCR would wait until "a pattern" of noncompliance had developed.<sup>54</sup> This decision, combined with the fact that HEW had given institutions until 1978 to fully comply with Title IX, slowed athletics departments' responses to the law.<sup>55</sup> These factors

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<sup>50</sup> Grundy and Shackelford, *Shattering the Glass*, p. 244; Blair Crumpacker, "New Title IX Rules End Equality Debate: Truce Guidelines Outline Fairness for All Athletes," *Oregon Daily Emerald* (January 31, 1980): p. 4.

<sup>51</sup> Welch Suggs, *A Place on the Team*, p. 81.

<sup>52</sup> Birch Bayh, "Speech of Senator Birch Bayh to the New York Women's Political Caucus," in *Equal Play*, eds. Nancy Hogshead-Makar and Andrew Zimbalist (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2007), p. 57.

<sup>53</sup> Alongside Title IX of the Education Amendments Act (1972), HEW's Office of Civil Rights was also responsible for enforcing Title VI of the Civil Rights Act (1964). The OCR's underfunding and understaffing began in the 1960s, and only worsened in the decades that followed. See James S. Murphy, "The Office for Civil Rights's Volatile Power," *The Atlantic* (March 17, 2017), <https://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2017/03/the-office-for-civil-rights-volatile-power/519072/>.

<sup>54</sup> Nancy Hicks, "Women's Groups and Educators Urge Approval of Sex Bias Rules," *New York Times* (June 26, 1975), p. 37.

<sup>55</sup> United States Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, "1975 Title IX Regulations," in *Equal Play*, eds. Nancy Hogshead-Makar and Andrew Zimbalist (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2007), p. 66.

combined to engender a climate in which Title IX was inconsistently enforced, allowing athletics administrators to flout the law.

Enforcement issues only worsened during the 1980s. After entering office in 1981, President Ronald Reagan cut the Department of Education's budget, damaging the OCR's power to enforce Title IX. In 1984, Donna Lopiano, one of the nation's only female athletics administrators, asserted that the OCR "stopped enforcing Title IX at all" after Reagan entered office.<sup>56</sup> Thanks to Reagan's budget cuts, the OCR dropped hundreds of complaints related to gender-based discrimination in athletics in the early 1980s, effectively telling female athletes that the federal government did not take their complaints seriously. Dropping complaints also sent the message to post-secondary schools that the OCR could not and would not seriously enforce Title IX.<sup>57</sup> Ultimately, the OCR's lax enforcement of Title IX emboldened institutions to continue resisting the law's regulations, knowing they were unlikely to face consequences.

Reducing the OCR's funding was only one way that Reagan's administration supported, and participated in, the political backlash against Title IX. Soon after the president's inauguration, the federal government reinterpreted Title IX's scope, stating that "only the specific program that received the federal funds was covered by antidiscrimination laws."<sup>58</sup> Title IX was seemingly no longer applicable to intercollegiate athletics departments, which typically ran on sports-generated revenues and private donations rather than federal support. In 1984, the Supreme Court of the United States cemented the Reagan administration's position, effectively eliminating Title IX's application to intercollegiate athletics in *Grove City College v. Bell*. *Grove's* consequences were immediate. The OCR placed forty-five discrimination complaints on "policy hold," and eventually

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<sup>56</sup> George Vecsey, "Sports of the Time; Help on Way for Title IX," *New York Times* (April 22, 1984), p. 3.

<sup>57</sup> Hogshead-Makar and Zimbalist, *Equal Play*, p. 100.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

moved to drop nearly all Title IX complaints.<sup>59</sup> As a result, just twelve years after the enactment of Title IX, female athletes nationwide were once again forced to traverse the male-dominated and male-focused intercollegiate athletics landscape without the protection of a federal anti-discrimination law.

By 1992, women's basketball players had experienced the backlash to Title IX for nearly two decades. While *Grove* was reversed in 1988 thanks to the Civil Rights Restoration Act, the damage had already been done. As the 1990s began, Title IX enforcement "remain[ed] difficult" in intercollegiate athletics.<sup>60</sup> Indeed, the backlash to Title IX, conducted in the name of protecting profitable men's sports, ensured that female athletes would struggle to experience the equitable treatment promised to them by federal law.

### ***The Impact of the Backlash: Athletics Administrations and Funding for Women***

The political backlash to Title IX in the 1970s and 1980s had a slew of consequences for women's basketball players, allowing post-secondary athletics departments to engage in a form of subtle sex discrimination known as "supportive discouragement." While opportunities for female athletes to participate in intercollegiate sports grew dramatically, women's basketball players continued to receive far fewer resources than their male counterparts. Indeed, these athletes would feel the effects of the backlash in their access to facilities, tournament structuring, the size of their coaching staffs, and travel funding.

One of the areas in which women's basketball players experienced ongoing financial and resource inequity was in their access to athletic facilities. Prior to Title IX's introduction, women's teams had struggled to access gyms or training spaces. Although Title IX improved the situation

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<sup>59</sup> Edward B. Fiske, "Education Watch; Going It Alone at Grove City," *New York Times* (May 5, 1985), p. 26.

<sup>60</sup> Laura Mansnerus, "Women Take to the Field," *New York Times* (January 5, 1992), p. 40.

for women's basketball teams, clear disparities persisted. Men's and women's basketball required and were mostly provided similar facilities and equipment, yet women's teams often had to settle for second choice when it came to selecting practice times. Men's teams were frequently granted access during the perceived best times, perpetuating a system of inequity. Reflecting on her time playing at the University of Albany in the mid-1970s, Tara Vanderveer recalled that "the men had the gym every day from two until six o'clock, so we didn't practice until evening. There was never a thought that we could split up the prime practice times between us."<sup>61</sup> It is likely that Albany's men's team received prime practice times due to its established economic importance to the athletics department and university, reflecting the financial considerations behind male athletics administrators' reluctance to reallocate or share resources with women's sports. Although practice times may appear unimportant, as women still had access to the gym, giving the men's teams the perceived best time slot indicated that athletics directors continued to prioritize men's sports despite Title IX.

Even accessing the gym for games, including important games, was sometimes difficult for women's basketball teams. At LSU in 1991, as Carla Berry remembered, the women's basketball team

won the right to host an NCAA tournament game, I think my junior year. But they had scheduled Sesame Street [*Sesame Street Live*, a touring version of the children's television show] and they had done it like a year in advance. The fact that they would schedule it during March was, first of all, kind of a gamble to begin with. Clearly, if the boys were hosting a game, they would've found Sesame Street somewhere else to go. But they opted to go with Sesame Street, and we travelled and ended up getting upset on the road.<sup>62</sup>

LSU's "Big Bird" incident was not isolated. A year earlier, Penn State's women's team was forced on the road for its first-round tournament game because the school had reserved their gym for a

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<sup>61</sup> Grundy & Shackelford, *Shattering the Glass*, p. 253.

<sup>62</sup> Carla Berry, interview by Meredyth Dwyer, September 19, 2022, interview 9, transcript, University of Western Ontario Department of History collection, p. 4.

men's game, demonstrating again the prioritization of men's basketball over women's.<sup>63</sup> And in 1989, LSU had lost its second-round home court advantage to a table tennis tournament.<sup>64</sup> These cases illustrate the continued precedence of men's athletics over women, but also the prioritization of profit. The fact that schools were willing to rent out their facilities for events like *Sesame Street Live* or table tennis tournaments, which they likely expected to make more money from than a women's NCAA tournament game, demonstrates the lack of financial support for and investment in women's basketball during this period. And, while these cases reveal a pattern of Title IX violations in intercollegiate basketball, the weak enforcement of the law due to backlash ensured little could or would be done to remedy them, thereby allowing financial and resource inequity to persist.

Tournament structuring after the NCAA's takeover of women's sports reveals another inequity between women's and men's basketball. From 1981 onwards, the NCAA sponsored annual championship tournaments for both men's and women's basketball at each level of play. Yet despite there being a similar number of men's and women's teams, the men's tournament was significantly larger. For example, in 1985, the women's Division I championship tournament featured thirty-two teams while the men's included sixty-four. At the Division II level, twenty-four women's teams competed versus thirty-two men's teams.<sup>65</sup> This discrepancy in tournament

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<sup>63</sup> The NCAA's National Invitation Tournament was the most prestigious post-season tournament in men's college basketball and used to determine a season's championship team. Its present-day equivalent is the NCAA's "March Madness" tournament.

<sup>64</sup> Kelli Anderson, "Sesame Seed: Big Bird and Gang Send the Lady Tigers Packing," *Sports Illustrated* (March 25, 1991), p. 14.

<sup>65</sup> "1985 Women's College Basketball NCAA Tournament," NCAA Tournaments, Sports Reference, accessed June 14, 2023, <https://www.sports-reference.com/cbb/postseason/women/1985-ncaa.html>; "1985 Men's College Basketball NCAA Tournament," NCAA Tournaments, Sports Reference, accessed June 14, 2023, <https://www.sports-reference.com/cbb/postseason/men/1985-ncaa.html>; *Division II Women's Basketball Championships Records Book* (Indianapolis, IN: National College Athletic Association, 2016), p. 13; *Division II Championships Records Book* (Indianapolis, IN: National College Athletic Association, 2010), p. 28, [http://fs.ncaa.org/Docs/stats/m\\_basketball\\_champs\\_records/2010/d2/champs.pdf](http://fs.ncaa.org/Docs/stats/m_basketball_champs_records/2010/d2/champs.pdf).

sizes exposes another layer of the ongoing prioritization of men's basketball over women's after Title IX's implementation. Furthermore, these differences demonstrate that once the NCAA had control of women's college sports, it was able to maintain the primacy of men's athletics and perpetuate sports' longstanding gender imbalance. Women's basketball players continued to face inequitable treatment in intercollegiate sports.

Women's basketball teams were also dramatically underfunded, which created a number of disparities in coaching and travel. At the University of Oregon in 1980, \$2.5 million dollars were allocated for football and men's basketball, whereas just \$500,000 was to be shared by all eleven women's sports.<sup>66</sup> Oregon may be an exceptional case, but in the early 1980s, men's athletics budgets were on average five times larger than women's budgets, nationwide.<sup>67</sup> By the end of the decade, women's teams still received significantly less money, getting anywhere from thirteen to thirty-three percent of the men's budgets.<sup>68</sup> Emboldened by the weakened state of Title IX and its non-enforcement, post-secondary institutions continued to inequitably fund women's sports more than a decade after Title IX's compliance deadline had passed.

Unequal budgets created clear disparities between women's and men's basketball, especially clear in the size of their coaching staffs. As Denise Hannah noted, coaching "was a little different," because her team had "one assistant coach, whereas the men had about three or four."<sup>69</sup> The situation was similar at Eastern Montana College (EMC) where the men's team "had a larger staff," consisting of a head coach, full-time assistant, and two graduate assistants. The women's

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<sup>66</sup> John Selix, "But at Oregon Harmony Prevails," *Oregon Daily Emerald* 81, no. 83 (January 29, 1980): p. 5B.

<sup>67</sup> D'Vera Cohn, "The glass is still only half full," *United Press International* (October 17, 1981).

<sup>68</sup> *Haffer v. Temple University*, 678 F. Supp. 517 (E.D. Pa. 1988); Margaret Wolf Freivogel, "West Texas State Lags in Backing Women Athletes," *St. Louis Post* (March 12, 1989), p. 1B; Gregor W. Pinney, "Hasselmo told to set goals for women's sports; Regents set a deadline for moving toward equity," *Star Tribune* (April 11, 1992), p. 1B.

<sup>69</sup> Denise Hannah, interview by Meredyth Dwyer, July 13, 2022, interview 5, transcript, University of Western Ontario Department of History collection p. 4.

team, on the other hand, had only one coach and one part-time assistant.<sup>70</sup> Due to the significant differences in funding, women's basketball teams could not afford to hire as many coaches, nor the same calibre of coaches as the men's teams.

Travel arrangements further highlight the disparities caused by inequal funding for women's and men's basketball programs, including differences in the modes of transportation, the number of athletes and coaches who could travel for away games, and the quality of accommodation and meals. Men's and women's teams often travelled to away games using very different modes of transport, with women using the less expensive option. Several narrators remembered that while the men went on "luxury coaches," women's teams often squished into passenger vans.<sup>71</sup> At Louisiana State University, the men's team "always flew charter flights" to away games, but the women's team "would take the bus or [fly] commercial."<sup>72</sup> Women's teams sometimes travelled with fewer players and coaches than their male counterparts. At EMC, Michelle Ferenz recalled, the women's side could only send "nine players and two coaches" to away games. Meanwhile, the men "travelled full rosters and their whole coaching staff."<sup>73</sup> These discrepancies point to the continued prioritization and exaltation of men's basketball by intercollegiate athletics departments. Indeed, the vastly inequitable treatment functioned to implicitly remind women's teams that they were marginal and did not deserve what the men received.

The quality of accommodation and meals for women's versus men's teams was also visibly different. Carla Berry, who played at LSU between 1989 and 1993, described the women's team's

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<sup>70</sup> Michelle Ferenz, interview by Meredyth Dwyer, August 10, 2022, interview 6, transcript, University of Western Ontario Department of History collection p. 8.

<sup>71</sup> Lisa Clarke, interview by Meredyth Dwyer, July 14, 2022, interview 4, transcript, University of Western Ontario Department of History collection, p. 5; Scott, interview 10, p. 4.

<sup>72</sup> Berry, interview 9, p. 4.

<sup>73</sup> Ferenz, interview 6, p. 2.



travel budget as “second class” compared to the men’s. Her team would “stay in three-star hotels” and eat “at a lot of cafeteria-style restaurants,” whereas “the boys could eat anywhere they wanted to” and stayed in the fanciest hotels.<sup>74</sup> Likewise, in the early 1980s at Towson State University (TSU) and the University of California Santa Barbara (UCSB), the men’s teams stayed at the Marriott while the women’s teams checked into Motel Sixes or Pickwick Inns.<sup>75</sup> There were not just discrepancies in the quality of accommodation for men’s versus women’s teams, but also in how many athletes were assigned per room. At UCSB, the women’s team was “always four to a room.”<sup>76</sup> When Kim Hayashi played Division III basketball in Oregon, her team’s budget was so small that she “shared a bed with the assistant coach.”<sup>77</sup> The limited budgets that women’s basketball teams received had a clear impact on the game’s athletes. Not only did these young women feel as though they were “second class” compared to men, but they were also forced into uncomfortable situations, like sharing beds with teammates or coaches. Despite Title IX’s existence, these disparities persisted due to its weakening by political backlash.

Ultimately, the backlash to Title IX ensured that women’s and men’s basketball teams experienced intercollegiate athletics in wholly different ways. Women’s squads in this era generally did not receive a similar level of financial support from their institutions as their male counterparts, resulting in stark disparities in facilities access, tournament structuring, coaching staffs, and travel resources. If budgets had been shared equitably, both male and female basketball players could have not only had a somewhat similar experience in athletics, particularly in terms of travelling safely and comfortably, without sharing beds or sleeping in marginal motels.

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<sup>74</sup> Berry, interview 9, p. 4.

<sup>75</sup> Clarke, interview 4, p. 5; Patricia Moore, interview by Meredyth Dwyer, July 14, 2022, interview 3, transcript, University of Western Ontario Department of History collection, p. 7.

<sup>76</sup> Moore, interview 3, p. 7.

<sup>77</sup> Hayashi, interview 2, p. 6.

## Scholarships

Despite the backlash, Title IX did have positive financial consequences for women's basketball players. The most obvious was that the law guaranteed female athletes could receive athletic scholarships. Before 1972, the AIAW forbade its participants from receiving any form of grant-in-aid related to athletics. But in the spring of 1973, the organization changed its policy, as a result of a Title IX lawsuit filed by women's tennis players at Marymount University, thereby opening the doors for a flood of scholarships to female athletes on college campuses nationwide.<sup>78</sup>

While the value of athletic scholarships for women's basketball players varied tremendously, just the fact that women athletes could receive them marked a success of Title IX. D'Ann Williams, for instance, received just \$150 in funding from Lenoir-Rhyne's athletics department during her second playing season in 1975-76, but she was among the first female athletes at her school to receive any athletic-based grant-in-aid.<sup>79</sup> Two years later, Jennifer Scott received a basketball scholarship that would cover her tuition at UVA, an approximate value of \$2,700. The following year, Scott's scholarship became a full ride, meaning her tuition, fees, and room and board were paid for by the athletics department.<sup>80</sup> Like Williams and Scott, all of the narrators received full or partial athletics scholarships to play basketball, demonstrating that, despite attempts to undermine it, Title IX did positively impact women's basketball players. Like their male counterparts, female athletes finally had the opportunity to benefit financially from their athletic skill and sportswomanship.

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<sup>78</sup> Suggs, *A Place on the Team*, p. 60.

<sup>79</sup> D'Ann Williams, interview by Meredyth Dwyer, June 24, 2022, interview 1, transcript, University of Western Ontario Department of History collection, p. 5.

<sup>80</sup> Jennifer Scott, interview by Meredyth Dwyer, September 21, 2022, interview 10, transcript, University of Western Ontario Department of History collection, p. 1. The University of Virginia does not publicly publish its historical tuition rates, so the tuition value has been estimated using Melanie Hanson's 2022 study of American college tuitions by year. See Melanie Hanson, "Average Cost of College by Year," Education Data Initiative, last modified January 9, 2022, <https://educationdata.org/average-cost-of-college-by-year#1970>.

Still, the opportunity to earn an athletic scholarship was hardly equitable. While men and women received scholarships of somewhat equal monetary value, at least when granted full rides, the opportunity to earn full or partial grant-in-aid was uneven. Denise Hannah remarked that Title IX allowed her to receive a full scholarship “just the same as they would offer a full scholarship on the men’s side,”<sup>81</sup> but the opportunity to earn a full scholarship as a woman was not “just the same” as the chance to receive one as a man. After assuming authority over the bulk of women’s intercollegiate athletics, the NCAA instituted policies that limited scholarship opportunities for women. For instance, during the 1985/86 season, NCAA Division I institutions could award 342 scholarships for men’s sports and 137 for women’s; at the Division II level, 117 scholarships were available for men versus 110 for women.<sup>82</sup> It should be noted that football, a sport with hundred-athlete rosters not played by women at the college level, was the main reason for Division I’s massive disparity between scholarships for men versus those for women. Still, men’s basketball teams were typically allowed to grant twelve full scholarships, whereas women’s squads were often capped at ten.<sup>83</sup> These policies suggest that the NCAA was using its newfound control to maintain the primacy of big-time men’s sports, ensuring that their programs would receive more scholarship funding than women’s programs. As a result, women athletes had fewer opportunities to earn a scholarship than their male counterparts.

Differences in roster sizes between women’s and men’s basketball programs also reveal the lack of equity in scholarship opportunities. In the twenty years after Title IX’s passage, women’s basketball teams were often outnumbered by men’s programs, and their rosters tended

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<sup>81</sup> Hannah, interview 5, p. 6.

<sup>82</sup> Richard L. Hembra, *Intercollegiate Athletics: Comparison of Selected Characteristics of Men’s and Women’s Programs* (Washington, DC: United States General Accounting Office, Health, Education and Human Services Division, June 1999), p. 8.

<sup>83</sup> Margaret Wolf Freivogel, “West Texas State Lags in Backing Women Athletes,” *St. Louis Post* (March 12, 1989), p. 1B.

to be smaller. During the 1981/82 season, 705 women's basketball teams participated at all levels of NCAA competition, with an average roster size of 13.7. In the same season, an average of 15.6 men competed on 741 teams.<sup>84</sup> By 1985/86, there was an equal number of women's and men's teams, but the number of athletes on either side remained uneven. Women's squads averaged fifteen players, whereas men's teams had about 18.4 (or 11,385 female athletes versus 13,965 male athletes).<sup>85</sup> Of course, when more schools offered men's basketball than women's basketball, men clearly had a greater opportunity to receive an athletic scholarship. Yet even when the number of teams reached near or full parity, we know that there were still thousands fewer athletes and that women's teams were not allowed to grant as many scholarships as the men. As a result, significantly more athletic scholarships were available to the young men playing intercollegiate basketball during this period than were available to their female counterparts.

On top of having more scholarships to award, men's basketball programs typically had more dollars to spend on recruitment than women's teams. Whereas men's programs had a level of funding that allowed them to send their coaches on recruiting trips, women's teams largely recruited from local talent pools or waited for young women to approach them.<sup>86</sup> Under the AIAW's rule, women's basketball players had to approach institutions and "sell [their] skills" because teams were not permitted to spend money on recruitment.<sup>87</sup> Recruitment inequities persisted once the NCAA overtook the bulk of women's sports. At EMC in the late 1980s, Michelle Ferenz remembered, the men's side had the money to "bring in guys from all over the nation" whereas the women's roster was largely recruited out of Montana and nearby states like

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<sup>84</sup> Erin Irick, *NCAA Sports Sponsorship and Participation Rates Report* (Indianapolis, IN: National Collegiate Athletic Association, October 2018), pp. 7-8.

<sup>85</sup> Irick, *NCAA Sports Sponsorship*, pp. 15-16.

<sup>86</sup> Grundy and Shackelford, *Shattering the Glass*, pp. 248, 251.

<sup>87</sup> Moore, interview 2, p. 5.

Washington.<sup>88</sup> Thanks to the Javits Amendment, men's basketball programs enjoyed much larger budgets than women's because of the concessions to profit-generating sports with vast crowds. Thus, men's basketball programs had more money to spend on recruitment. The popularity, and thereby profitability, of an athletics team is often correlated with its ability to win games, so many women's teams were at an immediate disadvantage because their lower budgets caused a struggle to draw in the same calibre of talent as on the men's side. Javits, by protecting the massive budgets of football and men's basketball, ensured many women's teams could not grow to the same level as profit-generating men's sports.

The granting of athletic scholarships to female athletes was undoubtedly one of Title IX's successes, yet the law's backlash limited the scope of this triumph. Opportunities for a young woman to earn a grant-in-aid for basketball paled in comparison to her male counterparts, a reality shaped by NCAA policies and the larger budgets for men's programs thanks to the lack of Title IX enforcement. Nevertheless, the fact that athletic scholarships existed in women's basketball points to the improvement made under Title IX—the law had a real impact on female athletes, even if that impact was constrained by an external backlash to the expansion of women's intercollegiate athletics.

### ***Coping: Women Athletes Deal with Economic Inequity***

Women's basketball players did not passively accept economic inequity under Title IX. Instead, young women reacted to the discrimination they faced, utilizing several different techniques to defend themselves against the inequities. Some athletes used Title IX to fight directly against sex-based discrimination, filing lawsuits or challenging their administrations. Others coped with the supportive discouragement in college athletics in subtler ways. As we have seen, the

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<sup>88</sup> Ferenz, interview 6, p. 10.

backlash to Title IX made it difficult for the OCR to follow up on complaints and enforce the law. Consequently, women had to find ways to psychologically cope with the sustained inequity in college athletics. As the narrators of this study revealed, two defense mechanisms—rationalization (the excusing and justifying of behaviour or events through reassuring explanations) and denial (the blocking of stressful situations from one’s awareness)—helped athletes put up with the inequities in intercollegiate sports.<sup>89</sup>

Women athletes occasionally confronted the financial disparities in sports head-on, using Title IX as a weapon to promote change. In 1978, the Michigan State University women’s squad launched a legal battle against the sex discrimination they faced in the school’s athletics department, culminating in the class-action lawsuit *Hutchins v. Board of Trustees of Michigan State University*.<sup>90</sup> While the MSU players’ lawsuit ultimately failed, the basketball team’s public fight for equity shows that women were not discouraged by the backlash to Title IX. Rather, female athletes sometimes rose against their powerful athletics departments to fight for the rights promised to them under federal law.

Just asking for changes sometimes led to more equitable treatment. Helen Higgs remembered that when her coaches at the University of Oregon requested charter buses instead of vans for the team’s travel, the athletics administration agreed to cover the cost.<sup>91</sup> While Oregon’s athletics department might have genuinely wanted to create a more equitable sports environment, it is possible that they were also concerned about the potential consequences of denying the coaches’ request. This was before the *Grove* ruling, when the OCR still had the authority to

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<sup>89</sup> Mariagrazia Di Giuseppe and J. Christopher Perry, “The Hierarchy of Defense Mechanism: Assessing Defensive Functioning With the Defense Mechanisms Rating Scales Q-Sort,” *Frontiers in Psychology* 12, no. 718440 (October 2021): pp. 10, 11.

<sup>90</sup> Belanger, *Invisible Seasons*, p. 5.

<sup>91</sup> Helen Higgs, interview by Meredyth Dwyer, September 15, 2022, interview 8, transcript, University of Western Ontario Department of History collection, p. 8.

conduct Title IX compliance reviews and enforce the law. If the OCR had found Oregon non-compliant, and the school thereafter refused to comply, its athletes could have taken the school to court, resulting in significant spending on trial attorneys—much more than the cost of a bus. Still, regardless of the athletics department’s reasons to fulfil the request, demanding better treatment was one means through which women athletes fought inequity, and it sometimes had the power to yield successful results.

While some athletes loudly challenged sex-based discrimination, others employed quieter coping mechanisms that indicate the mental impact of the backlash to Title IX. Rationalization was a common, discreet response of many women’s basketball players. Several narrators found ways to justify the financial-related discrimination they encountered in college sports, rationalizing the discrepancies between men’s and women’s basketball programs. D’Ann Williams, for instance, excused the lack of equity, asserting that she did not believe “we expected it.”<sup>92</sup> Other athletes were slightly more optimistic in their rationalizations of economic inequity. Kim Hayashi said, “In the moment, the system is what it is. You know, you question it or you don’t based on how much buildup of bad experience or exceptional experience hits you... It’s just like, ‘Oh yeah, we’re just *lucky* to be playing basketball.’ It still had that feeling.”<sup>93</sup> Michelle Ferenz echoed Hayashi’s statement, saying, “I think, ‘Yeah, we should have pushed harder for some things.’...But I didn’t think about it as a player. You just did it. You were *grateful* for what you got. You know, school was getting paid for. It could have been a lot worse.”<sup>94</sup>

There is no denying that women’s basketball players could have been treated “a lot worse.” Thanks to Title IX, these athletes had significantly more funding and support than those who

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<sup>92</sup> Williams, interview 1, p. 4.

<sup>93</sup> Hayashi, interview 4, p. 9. Emphasis added.

<sup>94</sup> Ferenz, interview 6, p. 8. Emphasis added.

played before them. Yet Williams, Hayashi, and Ferenz's statements suggest that the ambient sexism of life under patriarchy caused some female athletes to internalize and accept the discrimination they faced in intercollegiate athletics. Their stories demonstrate that some athletes felt powerless to effect change (as indeed, they were), revealing that the backlash not only had tangible effects on women athletes' access to resources but also a profound impact on their sense of agency. Indeed, it was often easier to be grateful for the changes that *did* happen under Title IX, than to fret over the how much was left to be done.

Other narrators used denial to cope with sex discrimination in athletics. That is, instead of accepting or confronting the financial-related discrimination they faced, some athletes simply ignored the inequities in college athletics. PJ Moore spoke of her "willful blindness" to the discrimination her and her teammates endured.<sup>95</sup> Similarly, Helen Higgs approached discrimination with the attitude of just "put your head down and take care of yourself."<sup>96</sup> PJ and Helen's memories suggest that to endure the persistent sex discrimination in college athletics, which was defiant to change due to Title IX enforcement issues, it was often easier to ignore inequity altogether. Denial allowed these women to focus on and enjoy playing basketball, instead of dwelling on the change-resistant inequities in intercollegiate sports,

Ultimately, during the 1970s and 1980s, women's basketball players responded to sex-based discrimination in intercollegiate athletics in a multitude of ways. While some confronted discrimination head on, others coped by rationalizing or denying the inequitable treatment they faced in college gymnasiums. In a climate where Title IX enforcement was scarce, the latter two coping mechanisms allowed college hoopers to appreciate the opportunities they had and enjoy playing basketball despite the ongoing sex discrimination plaguing athletics departments.

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<sup>95</sup> Moore, interview 6, p. 4.

<sup>96</sup> Higgs, interview 8, p. 7.



## **Conclusion**

The political backlash to Title IX had real effects on the experiences of women's basketball players. By weakening Title IX and its enforcement, the backlash emboldened college athletics departments, generally controlled by men who were devoted to their profit-generating men's programs, to flout compliance with the law. As a result, a state of subtle sex discrimination arose, in which women were outwardly encouraged to partake in college sports but held back from meaningful participation thanks to a lack of financial and resource equity. Female basketball players were still confronted with financial disparities that manifested in unequal access to facilities, differences in tournament structuring, dramatically dissimilar budgets for travel, coaching, and recruitment, and scholarships. To cope with the discrimination they endured, the young women playing basketball adopted several techniques. While some confronted sex-based discrimination head-on, using Title IX to launch legal battles or demanding more from their athletics departments, other young women simply denied or rationalized the disparities that persisted, believing there was little they could do in face of the backlash-induced enforcement issues. Ultimately, men's basketball retained its pre-eminence in the intercollegiate sports landscape while women's teams reckoned with a climate of supportive discouragement.

Despite the backlash, funding slowly flowed into women's varsity athletics programs at American colleges and universities. Women began receiving athletic scholarships and their programs saw budgetary increases that helped fund uniform and equipment improvements, access to facilities, and travel for away games. Though disparities between men's and women's basketball programs persisted in the 1970s and 1980s, Title IX drastically improved the number and quality of the opportunities available to female athletes. Title IX made a real difference in the lives of

women's basketball players, but its power to guarantee financial equity for women's sports was limited by the political backlash to the law.

## **Chapter Two: Social Backlash and Discrimination under Title IX**

Reflecting on Title IX's impact in intercollegiate sports, Kim Hayashi noted that while legislation can rouse positive change, it is difficult to "legislate hearts."<sup>97</sup> In other words, a law's passage is unlikely to change the hearts and minds—the attitudes, beliefs, and feelings—of individuals. Moreover, legislation can produce backlash, especially antidiscrimination laws that threaten the status quo like Title IX.

A backlash did indeed emerge in reaction to women athletes' advancements under Title IX. Sports had been socially constructed as a "masculine" field, and the increased participation of women in sports was perceived by many male coaches, administrators, athletes, and sports fans as a threat to men's dominance over athletics. The growing acceptance of women as athletes during the 1970s and 1980s also posed a challenge to hegemonic masculinity, or the dominant ways of being a man, because women's increased involvement in athletics challenged the idea that sports were inherently "masculine." As a result, a backlash emerged against women athletes and their achievements, in order to protect sports as a masculine domain, and police the connection between masculinity and athleticism.

Although the social backlash against the opportunities for women athletes created by Title IX was somewhat covert compared to the more public political backlash led by the NCAA, it was no less real. Women's basketball players faced direct and indirect forms of discrimination, including the trivialization of their athletic abilities and achievements, verbal attacks and stereotypes, and sometimes sexual harassment and assault. Title IX certainly did not create the misogyny felt by female athletes but, by dramatically improving American sportswomen's opportunities, visibility, and status, the law unleashed a misogynistic reaction by threatening to

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<sup>97</sup> Hayashi, interview 2, p. 10.

dismantle men's dominance over athletics and the historical association between sports and masculinity.

This chapter explores the informal social discrimination—the backlash—that women basketball players experienced during the first two decades of Title IX's protection. It begins with a discussion of gender norms in athletics to demonstrate how the advancement of women's sports posed a threat to America's patriarchal heterosexist social order. It then examines how women's basketball players experienced social backlash, finding that athletes faced counterattacks in four chief ways: the stereotyping of female athletes; the lacking support for and flippant attitudes towards women's basketball and its athletes; the symbolic annihilation of women athletes in national and campus media; and instances of sexual harassment and violence. The chapter then discusses the social treatment and experiences of Black female athletes, highlighting how the sexist backlash to Title IX was compounded by anti-Black racism.

### **Gender Norms in American Sports**

By the 1970s, sports had long been regarded as a traditionally “masculine” domain in the United States. Athletics were closely linked to masculinity during the Victorian era, when boys and young men were encouraged to engage in athletic competition as means to cultivate the competitive spirit and physical power, qualities associated with men.<sup>98</sup> Conversely, many Victorian women were discouraged from participating in certain sports and physical activities as they were viewed as unfeminine. A pervasive belief in the ‘myth of frailty,’ which held that women's bodies and minds could not handle the competitiveness and physical toll of athletic pursuits, further constrained female participation in physically demanding sports like basketball or

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<sup>98</sup> Jennifer Hargreaves, *Sporting Females: Critical Issues in the History and Sociology of Women's Sports* (New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 43.

track and field, supporting the notion that women were physically and mentally inferior to men.<sup>99</sup> Consequently, there were limited prospects for Victorian women to participate in sports.

Victorian attitudes about gender and sports persisted in the twentieth century. Women's participation in sports was viewed as making them masculine, highlighting the deep association between athleticism and masculinity. In 1912, Dudley A. Sargent, an American doctor and physical educator, penned an opinion piece in the *Ladies' Home Journal*, warning that "athletics are making girls bold, masculine and overassertive; that they are destroying the beautiful lines and curves of her figure, and are robbing her of that charm and elusiveness that has so long characterized the female sex."<sup>100</sup> Sargent linked athletics to the 'masculinization' of women and worried that female athletes would not be able to maintain their "beautiful curves" and "charm." His ideas reinforced the notion that sports were masculine and meant for men. These ideas about female frailty and the association between masculinity and athleticism let men dominate American sports for at least the first three quarters of the twentieth century.

The association of sports and masculinity persisted during the 1970s and 1980s. While the enactment of Title IX and the subsequent expansion of women's sports encouraged Americans to confront stereotypes about female athletes and femininity, sportswomen were still widely viewed as deviating from traditional gender norms.<sup>101</sup> Sports' historical construction as inherently masculine meant that when women participated in and excelled at athletic pursuits, especially traditionally "masculine" sports like basketball, they were represented and stigmatized as a threat

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<sup>99</sup> Nancy Theberge, "Women's Athletics and the Myth of Female Frailty," in *Women: A Feminist Perspective*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed., ed. Jo Freeman (Mountain View, CA: Mayfield, 1989), p. 507.

<sup>100</sup> Dudley A. Sargent, "Are Athletics Making Girls Masculine?: A Practical Answer to a Question Every Girl Asks," in *Women and Sports in the United States: A Documentary Reader*, eds. Jean O'Reilly and Susan K. Cahn (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2007), p. 56.

<sup>101</sup> Peter Alfano, "Signs of Problems Amid the Progress," *New York Times* (December 15, 1985), p. 1.

to both hegemonic masculinity and femininity.<sup>102</sup> As a result, the femininity and heterosexuality of female athletes was consistently drawn into question throughout these decades.

Many young women athletes were keen to avoid the stigmas associated with participation in athletics, as women with visible muscles, a physical trait associated with traditional notions of masculinity, threatened to undermine America's patriarchal, heterosexist notions of gender.<sup>103</sup> As a result, many engaged in "apologetic" behaviours, attempting to embody traditional notions of femininity.<sup>104</sup> Many women's basketball players, for instance, chose to wear make-up, hairstyles, and clothes that emphasized a "womanly" appearance; they also joined sororities, or avoided their lesbian teammates in the name of appearing to comply with traditional heterosexist gender norms.

In the minds of those opposed to Title IX, women's rapidly expanding presence as intercollegiate athletes not only threatened to take opportunities away from male athletes, but also threatened the norms of both femininity and masculinity. As a result, women's basketball players encountered a fierce social backlash, experiencing trivialization, negative heterosexist stereotypes, and sexual harassment and violence in reaction to their increased presence on college campuses.

### ***Social Discrimination: How Women Basketball Players Experienced Backlash***

Between 1975 and 1992, women's basketball players faced a social backlash to their growing visibility and acceptance in American society. Intercollegiate women's basketball players felt this backlash in three main ways: a lack of support for, and trivialization of, women's basketball by undergraduates and the media; heterosexist stereotyping of female basketball players as "unfeminine," "unladylike," or "lesbian"; and sexual violence and harassment. Ultimately, this

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<sup>102</sup> Hargreaves, *Sporting Females*, p. 250; Miller, *Coaching the Female Athlete*, p. 6.

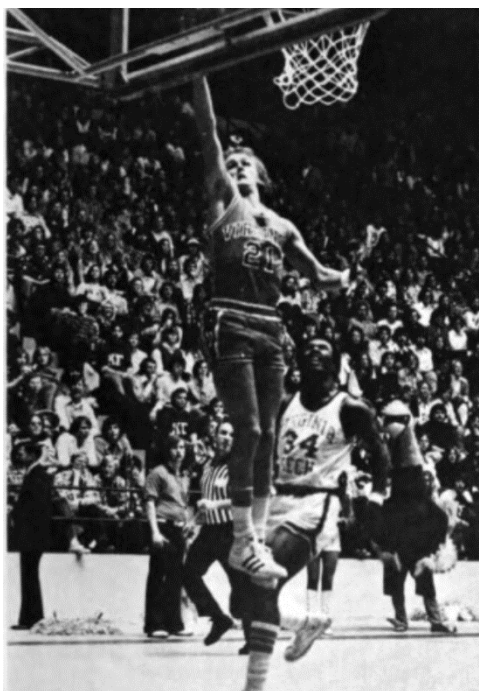
<sup>103</sup> Precilla Choi, *Femininity and the Physically Active Woman* (Philadelphia: Routledge, 2000), p. 9.

<sup>104</sup> Elizabeth Hardy, "The Female 'Apologetic' Behaviour within Canadian Women's Rugby: Athlete Perceptions and Media Influences," *Sport in Society* 18, no. 2 (2015): p. 156.

social backlash ensured that the young women playing college basketball during this period would experience sexist treatment related to their status as intercollegiate athletes.

One of the most obvious forms of the social backlash felt by female basketball players was a lack of support for, and trivialization of, women's college basketball by both the media and the public. Though Title IX could force colleges and universities to establish women's teams, the law could not force individuals to get on board with women's sports. In fact, quite the opposite occurred, with many male sports fans and writers openly hostile to women's basketball, or at least viewing the game's athletes and their accomplishments as trivial or marginal compared to those of male athletes.

During the 1970s, women's squads often failed to draw the same crowds that attended men's matchups. Figures 1 and 2 reveal the stark difference in attendance at many men's versus women's basketball games during this decade. While men's teams enjoyed significant fan support,



*Figure 1: The UVA men's basketball team plays in front of a large crowd, c. 1975. Corks & Curls (1975).*



*Figure 2: There are no fans in the stands for a UVA women's basketball game, c. 1975. Corks & Curls (1975)*

women's teams frequently struggled to fill seats. Sexism played a major role in the lack of spectators at women's matchups, as many undergraduates believed that "women athletes just

weren't as good as the male athletes."<sup>105</sup> On the assumption that female athletes could not be as talented as their male counterparts, college and university students often snubbed women's games in favour of men's matchups, perpetuating the social sex discrimination faced by female athletes. As a result, some undergraduates, perhaps unintentionally, contributed to the marginalization of women's basketball programs and perpetuated traditional gender norms related to athletics.



*Figure 3: A curtain looms behind play at an LSU v. Jackson State women's basketball game, during the 1988/89 season, concealing the lack of a crowd. Gumbo Yearbook (1989).*

Though women's college basketball became more widely played, more competitive, and more profitable during the 1980s, even the most successful women's teams struggled to draw crowds. Carla Berry remembered that in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the LSU athletics department "drop[ped] a curtain when we played so that you couldn't see that there was nobody sitting in the stands behind us."<sup>106</sup> It is interesting that LSU's athletics department responded to the lack of spectators at women's basketball games by concealing the empty seats with a curtain, rather than increasing the team's marketing and promotion. Instead, LSU accepted that its highly successful women's team would play to an empty arena while the men's team sold out almost every game, ensuring the primacy, and dominance, of men's basketball.

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<sup>105</sup> Clarke, interview 4, p. 7.

<sup>106</sup> Berry, interview 9, transcript, p. 6.



The disparity in attendance between men's and women's basketball games can also be attributed to differences in marketing. Certainly, it cannot have helped that women's teams often received less coverage and promotion than men's squads. For instance, at UCSB in the early 1980s, the women's basketball team was "lucky if there was a sign outside the gym saying that we were playing."<sup>107</sup> At EMC, the men's program was "definitely the marquee," even though coverage of women's basketball was somewhat better due to a team member working for the student newspaper.<sup>108</sup> If students were unaware that women's basketball games were taking place, it would have been impossible for them to attend; when women's sports were rendered invisible, they could not pose a threat to male athletics. Yet, even when women's matchups received media coverage, they were often framed as a complement to the more important men's program, which implicitly encouraged fans to prioritize men's games. Not only was the meagreness of the coverage for women's basketball sexist, reporting of women's sports also encouraged sports fans to disregard the game, limiting the recognition of female athletes and their successes.

Indeed, the average undergraduate's limited interest in women's basketball was somewhat related to sports coverage and marketing. With more women playing basketball at more schools, opportunities for students to attend matches and support the teams grew. Yet, as the massive disparities in crowd sizes indicate, students did not show up to women's basketball games in great numbers. Lisa Clarke explained that the mindset was: "You'll go to the men's basketball game; you'll go the men's football game. There are big events around that. It's meant to be seen. Students didn't wander in to watch the women's basketball game just because they were free on a Friday night and that was the thing to do."<sup>109</sup> For most undergraduates, attending a women's basketball

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<sup>107</sup> Moore, interview 3, p. 7.

<sup>108</sup> Ferenz, interview 6, p. 5.

<sup>109</sup> Clarke, interview 4, p. 7.

game was certainly not “the thing to do,” and the way men’s sports were marketed was largely responsible. In the promotion for Towson’s men’s basketball season finale in 1986, students were enticed to attend with various incentives such as “Free East Coast Tournament basketball tickets,” “discount coupons” for merchandise at the university’s bookstore, and the chance to partake in a “color t.v. foul shot contest.” Attendees were also invited to a “free post-game dance” with “free *Saturday Night Live* admission tickets,” all of which was heavily marketed in the student newspaper. In contrast, the women’s game, which was held two days prior, received little to no marketing, with the newspaper failing to even mention the game’s location.<sup>110</sup> The clear disparity in promotion helped to ensure that the men’s game was packed, while the women played to a small crowd. Non-sports minded undergraduates had nothing to gain from going to the women’s game; there were no prizes, and it was unlikely their friends would be there, meaning it could not serve as a social outing. Thus, men’s basketball continued to be a significant part of the undergraduate social scene, implicitly perpetuating the supremacy of male athletes in college students’ psyche.

Many American undergraduates did not take women’s sports seriously, adopting a dismissive attitude towards female athletes and their accomplishments. Women’s basketball players were consistently reminded that their classmates saw them as insignificant compared to football or men’s basketball. Evelyn Thompson outlined the attitude of her peers, remembering hearing students at Auburn say, ““You guys are good, but you guys are not football...You guys don’t put in the work that football puts in. You don’t even put in the time that the men’s basketball players put in.””<sup>111</sup> In 1980, UCLA’s Denise Curry reported that “people don’t take women’s athletics as seriously as they should,” and treated female athletes “like we’re not as dedicated or

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<sup>110</sup> “Basketball Extras for Students,” *The Towerlight* 79, no. 18 (February 20, 1986): p. 5, 4.

<sup>111</sup> Evelyn Thompson, interview by Meredyth Dwyer, September 2, 2022, interview 7, transcript, Western University Department of History collection, p. 12. Emphasis added.

as skilled” as their male counterparts.<sup>112</sup> Thompson and Curry’s statements reveal several things about the discrimination women’s basketball faced. First, even when women played for highly successful programs, their peers dismissed their success as lesser than the success of men’s sports teams, perpetuating the notion that female athletes were inferior to their male counterparts.<sup>113</sup> Second, while some students recognized the talent of women’s basketball players, many still believed that men were the “real” athletes, and that women could not possibly train and play at the same level as men. Ultimately, these sexist attitudes kept students from attending women’s games, believing they were not as interesting or important as men’s matchups.

To be clear, some women’s basketball programs enjoyed considerable fan support. Evelyn Thompson, Helen Higgs, and Michelle Ferez each remembered their teams having “great fans” and drawing “huge crowds” that really “loved women’s basketball, demonstrating a growing appreciation for women’s athleticism.”<sup>114</sup> Still, sexism continued to prevent fans from taking women’s basketball overall seriously and attending their games. While 1,378,357 fans attended Division I women’s games in 1987, men’s games drew over twenty million.<sup>115</sup> In the same year, UCSB’s head coach Mark French pleaded with fans not to “ignore women’s basketball come next winter.”<sup>116</sup> French’s statement makes clear that many people were still not paying attention to the women’s game and, while the successes of some teams were being recognized, others continued to loom in the shadow of men’s basketball and football. Ultimately, the lack of support for women’s basketball from undergraduate sports fans suggests that even though Title IX attempted to mandate equity, the law could not force gender norms associated with athletics to change.

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<sup>112</sup> “Sports News,” *United Press International* (December 14, 1980).

<sup>113</sup> During Thompson’s time at Auburn, her team played in three consecutive NCAA Division One National Championship games, making women’s basketball the most successful athletics program at Auburn at the time. When Curry played at UCLA, her team won an AIAW National Championship.

<sup>114</sup> Ferez, interview 6, p. 5; Higgs, interview 8, p. 5; Thompson, interview 7, p. 8.

<sup>115</sup> Mike Weil, “Women’s Basketball is Gaining Support,” *United Press International* (November 12, 1988).

<sup>116</sup> Jason Meyer, *The Daily Nexus* 68, no. 5 (July 15, 1987): p. 10.

Both American national and campus media marginalized female athletes, rarely covering them and trivializing them when they did, which functioned to maintain hegemonic masculinity in sport.<sup>117</sup> During the 1970s and 1980s, female basketball players were often underrepresented or entirely absent from sports coverage, even though tens of thousands of young women were playing the game. Between 1970 and 1990, *Sports Illustrated (SI)* featured women athletes on its cover only thirty times in about 1040 issues, with not one women's basketball player appearing on the magazine's front. Most of *SI*'s cover-women played individual sports that had long been viewed as acceptably "feminine": dressage, ice skating, gymnastics, and tennis.<sup>118</sup> By underrepresenting female athletes, *SI* was, in effect, telling its predominantly male readership that women's athleticism was not as important or as interesting as men's. Moreover, the magazine reinforced the view that the only acceptable athletic pursuits for women were traditionally "feminine" activities, rather than "masculine" sports like basketball.

Student publications underrepresented and erased women basketball players, too. Women athletes were largely absent or marginalized from campus media, especially student yearbooks. Comparing the coverage of men's versus women's basketball in yearbook samples from four universities at four different years between 1975 and 1990, it is clear that men's teams were consistently prioritized. In the University of Oregon's 1975 yearbook, eight pages featuring eighteen images were dedicated to men's basketball; the women's team got just one page and four pictures. In 1981, UVA's yearbook reserved six pages with twenty-two pictures for the men's team, while the women were featured in fifteen images across three pages. Four years later, the 1985 UCSB yearbook gave the men three pages with nine images; the women's team were featured

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<sup>117</sup> Choi, *Femininity and the Physically Active Woman*, p. 33; Lois Bryson, "Sport and the Maintenance of Masculine Hegemony," in *Women, Sport, and Culture*, eds. Susan Birrell and Cheryl L. Cole (Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics, 1994), pp. 50, 53-4.

<sup>118</sup> Miller, *Coaching the Female Athlete*, p. 6.

across two pages with five pictures. The worst disparity came in 1990, when the LSU yearbook assigned eight pages with twenty-three pictures to men's basketball and just two pages with five images for the women's team.<sup>119</sup> Such disparities in coverage centered men's basketball while making women's basketball seem peripheral and even frivolous. This underrepresentation of women's basketball players undermined and discredited them as athletes, limiting their perceived threat to men's hegemony by minimizing and marginalizing their presence on college campuses.

Campus newspapers also contributed to the marginalization of women's basketball by erasing its existence and trivializing its significance. In January 1976, a student writer for the UCSB student newspaper wrote of the "pretty grim" state of campus sport during the winter term, complaining that basketball was simply "the spectacle of ten *guys* in polyester underwear" running around a gym court.<sup>120</sup> A decade later, the *Auburn Plainsman* published an article called "Basketball integrity in jeopardy with scandals, academic controversies," in which a student writer lamented the decline of "this great game" without acknowledging the existence of women's basketball.<sup>121</sup> Both articles used the gender-neutral noun "basketball" to mean *men's* basketball, erasing the existence of women's basketball players. Moreover, despite the critiques of men's basketball, the absence of any mention to the women's game implied that the writers did not think it was significant or serious enough to even warrant criticism, perpetuating the notion that only "serious" athletic endeavours, i.e., men's basketball, warranted serious reporting. Effectively, both papers symbolically annihilated women's basketball players, not only implying that they were less important than their male counterparts, but that they did not exist at all.

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<sup>119</sup> University of Oregon, *Oregana Yearbook* (1975), pp. 158-165, 194; University of Virginia, *Cork & Curls* (1981), pp. 156-165; University of California Santa Barbara, *La Cumbre Yearbook* (1985), pp. 138-143; Louisiana State University, "Gumbo Yearbook, Class of 1990," *Gumbo Yearbook* (1990): pp. 133-139, 146-147.

<sup>120</sup> Martin Chorich, "Moves in for the Shot and Scores," *The Daily Nexus* 56, no. 54 (January 8, 1976): 4. Emphasis added.

<sup>121</sup> "Basketball's integrity in jeopardy with scandals, academic controversies," *The Auburn Plainsman* 92, no. 13 (January 30, 1986):

Some student writers believed that women's sports could not exist without profit-generating men's programs. In 1980, a female sportswriter for the *Oregon Daily Emerald* asked the newspaper's student readers to "face it – women's athletics wouldn't exist without football."<sup>122</sup> Student reporting such as the *ODE*'s perpetuated the backlash to the growth of women's sports, like basketball, in several ways. By framing the existence of women's sports, including basketball, as dependent on a men's program, this reporting functioned to marginalize female athletes and reinforce men's dominance in sports. Additionally, because media discreetly influences its audience simply in the way a story is told, the *ODE*'s story likely impacted the general student population's thoughts about women's sports, teaching them that female athletes owed their existence, and were thereby properly subordinate, to men.<sup>123</sup> By underrepresenting, trivializing, and marginalizing women's basketball players and other female athletes, student publications contributed to the backlash against Title IX's expansion of women's athletics.

Women's basketball players also experienced social backlash through heterosexist stereotyping. In 1985, for example, an *SI* writer ridiculed Cheryl Miller, a standout forward at the University of Southern California (USC), for her "horrid" on-court behaviour: "drop-kick[ing] the ball," "point[ing] in enemy faces and at scoreboards," and having "to be restrained from fighting." *SI* further condemned Miller's actions, writing that she was "a woman, but not necessarily a lady."<sup>124</sup> Why were Miller's actions so abhorrent? The forward's main offence was that she, as a Black woman, failed to conform to traditional gender expectations for women by exhibiting the aggressive and arrogant behaviour associated with men's sports. While *SI* could not deny Miller

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<sup>122</sup> Tamara Swenson, "Women's sports are firing up, but football still keeps 'em alive," *Oregon Daily Emerald* 82, no. 35 (October 22, 1980): 7.

<sup>123</sup> W. James Potter, "Media Influence," in *Media Effects* (Washington, DC: SAGE Publications, 2012), p. 61.

<sup>124</sup> Curry Kirkpatrick, "Lights! Camera! Cheryl!," *Sports Illustrated* (November 20, 1985).

of her womanhood, the magazine dictated to its readers that she exhibited stereotypical masculine characteristics, thereby protecting the traditional notion of a feminine (white) “lady.”

Sex stereotyping can also be seen in the naming practices for women’s teams. As women’s athletics programs merged with men’s programs in the early 1980s, many women’s teams received team names with the feminine qualifier “lady,” typically added in front of a non-gendered team name. For example, LSU’s women’s teams were known as the “Lady Tigers,” while the men were referred to as the “Tigers.” The main problem with “lady” was the tone of frivolity it conveyed, which contributed to the notion that women’s athletics were trivial. Indeed, the term probably functioned to reduce the perceived threat that women’s successes in athletics supposedly posed to men.<sup>125</sup>

Women’s basketball players were also the target of another powerful stereotype: that female athletes were lesbians. Many of the narrators recounted feeling that other students thought they were lesbians because they played basketball. Denise Hannah remarked that it seemed like people “just assumed that because you were an athlete, especially basketball, that you were naturally gay.”<sup>126</sup> This stereotyping, known as lesbian labeling, worked to discredit women’s participation in non-traditional gender role behavior, which posed a threat to the dominant patriarchal and heterosexist system. By labelling female athletes as lesbian, society attempted to ostracize and control them.<sup>127</sup>

Female athletes went to great lengths to avoid the lesbian label and the consequences associated with it, demonstrating the stereotype’s psychological power. Some narrators noted that

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<sup>125</sup> Cynthia F. Pelak, “The Relationship of Sexist Naming Practices and Athletic Opportunities in Colleges and Universities in the Southern United States,” *Sociology of Education* 81, no. 2 (2008): p. 191.

<sup>126</sup> Hannah, interview 5, p. 4.

<sup>127</sup> Elaine M. Blinde and Diane E. Taub, “Homophobia and Women’s Sports: The Disempowerment of Athletes,” *Sociological Focus* 25, no. 2 (May 1992): p. 151; Choi, *Femininity and the Physically Active Woman*, p. 39.

they or their teammates made calculated efforts to be seen with boyfriends to accentuate their heterosexuality. Others recognized that “there were two different social groups to hang out with,” demonstrating that some athletes shunned known or suspected lesbians fearing they might be seen as lesbian themselves.<sup>128</sup> While the efforts of straight athletes to avoid being labeled lesbian indicate the psychological toll such a stereotype had, these assumptions were doubly damaging to lesbian athletes.<sup>129</sup> As indicated by the narrators, lesbian basketball players not only contended with homophobia from the public, but also from their own teammates. As a result, many lesbian athletes were never “really out,” fearing ostracization from their straight teammates and a homophobic response from society at large.<sup>130</sup> In this way, the social backlash to female athletes had a powerful, negative impact on women’s basketball players.

Basketball’s athletes, coaches, administrators, and rule makers often made specific efforts to play up femininity on and off the court for reasons beyond avoiding the lesbian label. During the 1970s and 1980s, more ‘feminine’ sportswomen usually received greater celebration and acceptance, meaning those involved with women’s sports often went to great lengths to highlight femininity.<sup>131</sup> This desire within women’s basketball to accentuate femininity was made clear by Evelyn Thompson, who remarked that many female athletes feel like they “‘gotta prove I’m not hyper-masculine’” or ‘I gotta prove that I’m feminine.’”<sup>132</sup>

Female basketball players frequently attempted to emphasize their femininity. PJ Moore remembered that some of her teammates at UCSB had long “ponytails” or were “sorority sisters,” both considered signs of femininity.<sup>133</sup> In 1990, Roxanna Redden, a member of LSU’s basketball

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<sup>128</sup> Higgs, interview 8, p. 8; Clarke, interview 4, p. 6; Choi, *Femininity and the Physically Active Woman*, p. 39.

<sup>129</sup> Choi, *Femininity and the Physically Active Woman*, p. 41.

<sup>130</sup> Williams, interview 1, p. 6.

<sup>131</sup> Choi, *Femininity and the Physically Active Woman*, p. 8.

<sup>132</sup> Thompson, interview 7, p. 26.

<sup>133</sup> Moore, interview 3, p. 5; Susan Brownmiller, *Femininity* (New York: Fawcett Columbine, 1985), p. 55.



team, competed in the Miss Louisiana beauty pageant, signaling that her athleticism was not a threat to her femininity.<sup>134</sup> These actions highlight the pressure that female athletes faced to conform to traditional gender norms in order to be accepted as sportswomen. While emphasizing femininity itself is not problematic, the efforts women's basketball players took to do so reflects how the backlash against the growth of women's sports impacted athletes. These young women struggled to balance their athleticism with social pressures surrounding femininity in an attempt to receive recognition, gain acceptance in a patriarchal heterosexist society, and alleviate some of the discrimination that female athletes encountered.

Coaches also urged their athletes to maintain a more 'feminine' appearance. Michelle Ferez remembered her coaches requesting that her and her teammates "wear dresses" to events and wear their "hair down" in photoshoots.<sup>135</sup> Ferez's memory reveals that some women's basketball's coaches understood that female athletes would be more palatable and acceptable if they adhered to traditional gender norms. While Ferez's coaches could have been acting to protect their athletes from negative backlash, their actions can also be interpreted as enforcing normative social expectations of femininity. By encouraging their athletes to behave or dress in more 'feminine' ways, coaches were reinforcing hegemonic femininity and the protection of hegemonic masculinity. Regardless of a coach's intentions, these actions functioned to maintain the association between athleticism and masculinity, while ostracizing female athletes who did not conform to normative heterosexist understandings of gender.

Basketball's rule makers also tried to make women's basketball more 'feminine.' Since the 1890s, women physical educators at American universities had carefully developed and promoted an 'adapted model' of basketball to ward off fears of masculineness. As a result, women's

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<sup>134</sup> *Gumbo Yearbook, 1990*, p. 28.

<sup>135</sup> Ferez, interview 6, p. 9.

basketball had significantly different rules than men's, meant to make it a less strenuous activity with less movement, less contact, and very little aggression.<sup>136</sup> In the 1980s, the game's rule makers worked to ensure that women's basketball would remain "ladylike." The rules committee first legislated a smaller ball, "about one inch less in circumference and 2 ounces lighter than the previous ball," and then introduced the three-point field goal.<sup>137</sup> These new rules encouraged an 'outside' game, forcing play out from under the net and instead spreading it around the court, ensuring less contact and thereby a gentler, more 'ladylike' game.<sup>138</sup> Changing the rules of women's basketball in such a way implies how deeply the social backlash impacted women's sports. Rather than allowing the aggressive play that defined the men's game, basketball's rule makers opted to preserve the ladylike standards of the adapted model, thereby shaping the game such that appeared as less of a threat to the men's version or to hegemonic masculinity in sports.

### **Sexual Harassment and Violence in Intercollegiate Basketball**

Women's basketball players experienced social backlash in the form of sexual harassment and violence. During the 1970s and 1980s, sexual harassment was a persistent and prevalent form of sex discrimination on college campuses. Female athletes, who represented women's entrance into a non-traditional field, were especially likely to experience such behaviour.<sup>139</sup> In fact, nearly every narrator recounted a moment in which they or a teammate had been subjected to sexual violence or harassment.

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<sup>136</sup> Theberge, "Women's Athletics and the Myth of Female Frailty," p. 510-11.

<sup>137</sup> National Collegiate Athletic Association, *NCAA Women's Basketball Playing Rules History* (Indianapolis, IN: National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2019), p. 4.

<sup>138</sup> Heisch, "Ruling Women Out," p. 24.

<sup>139</sup> Karen Bogart and Nan Stein, "Breaking the Silence: Sexual Harassment in Education," *Peabody Journal of Education* 64, no. 4 (Summer 1987): p. 146.

Sexual harassment functioned to intimidate female athletes, reminding them that they were not fully welcome in the traditionally male-dominated field of sports. Kim Hayashi recollected that

A guy had seen our games and he called up the athletic department and he asked for my name and my phone number, and they gave it to him. So, I get this call and he says, “Hey, I’m so and so. I met you; we were in the same checkout at Fred Meyer.” It’s a grocery store. “And I liked you. So, I came to your game the other night, and I was wondering if you wanted to go on a date?” And I’m the kind of person where I wasn’t sure what my risk was at that moment. So, I was like, “Oh, you know, thanks so much.” I played it that way, but in my heart, I was like, “What the hell? Why would you give him my phone number? Why would you tell him where I live?” They gave him my address!<sup>140</sup>

Fearful of how this young man would react to a blunt rejection, and understanding that he knew where she lived, Hayashi responded to his advance by

play[ing] it like, “Oh, it’s so sweet of you. No, I’m seeing someone right now, but thanks a lot.” I wasn’t seeing anyone at that time, but I played it that way because it felt important not to tick him off because I wasn’t sure where he was coming from. I wasn’t sure if he was stable.<sup>141</sup>

Evelyn Thompson also recalled being stalked while she was enrolled in university. At Auburn University,

Somehow, this person would always have my phone number or get my phone number. We could be away at a tournament or something and I would receive flowers. I would get phone calls at the hotel, and they would be like, “I’m sending you flowers. Did you get my flowers?” And I was like, “What in the world?” Somehow this voice sounds familiar, but I wasn’t quite sure what it was. I don’t know where I’ve heard this voice before. Anyway, this person somehow knew my whole schedule. When I would go home, I would find flowers there in the middle of the night or something like that. That means that person had to come in the middle of the night, place the flowers there. It got kind of crazy.<sup>142</sup>

Unlike Hayashi’s, Thompson’s stalker was not a fan of Auburn’s basketball team. Rather,

This person...actually ended up being an employee of the university athletic department. The way I found out who this person was is that I was going to my coach’s office one day and... I was walking up through ramps and I was shuffling through some papers. I was looking down, which you obviously should never do, but I wasn’t paying attention. As I

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<sup>140</sup> Hayashi, interview 2, p. 7.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

<sup>142</sup> Thompson, interview 7, pp. 3-4.

walked down the stairway, I wasn't looking up and I heard somebody walking down there. I didn't pay attention. I just assumed it was another athlete or whatever. When I looked up, I heard somebody say, "Hey, Evelyn!" And that alarm that goes off in the back of your head. And I was like, "Is that the same voice that calls me?!" And then I know this is the person who's stalking me. "Is that the voice?" I just went into this cold sweat, and I just stopped. I look up and it's somebody that I recognize. This is a coach. This is a person that I know. This person says to me, "Hey, I just wanted to talk to you for a minute."<sup>143</sup>

However, like Hayashi, being confronted by her stalker instilled a deep sense of fear in Thompson.

She remembered how

All these alarms are going off and I'm like...it was fight or flight kind of situation. So, I said to this person, because he was standing in front of me in like an aggressive manner...I was like, "Excuse me, but I don't have time to talk right now. I'm on my way to coach's office." And he says, "Well, I just wanna talk to you for a minute. I wanted to ask you out." I was like, "Uh, that is inappropriate." I was like, "No, I'm not interested in going out with you." And he was like, "Well, why?" He says, "Because I've asked around and I've talked to the trainer...I've talked to some people in the training room, and they told me you go out with white guys." I was like, "What!?" You actually just said that? A "what's going on" kind of thing. So, I was like, "Listen, I don't care what you've heard," or whatever else, "but that's inappropriate. I'm not going out with you. I need to get by you." At first, he wasn't gonna let me by. He was gonna demand that I talked to him, and I was like, "Listen, I'm going up to see coach." He finally just stepped aside, and I was able to get by. I went up and I told my coach, so they dealt with that person.<sup>144</sup>

Hayashi and Thompson's stories demonstrate how sexual harassment functioned as a weapon in the backlash against female athletes. Both women appear to have been perceived as objects of sexual desire, which imposed women's traditional subordinate role in American society onto them. For Thompson, this subjugation was compounded by race, as she was explicitly targeted based on both her athletic status and because she was Black. Furthermore, the athletes' response to being confronted by their stalker, the "alarm bells" and fear of "tick[ing] him off," demonstrate the profound intimidation that sexual harassment often causes. Fear alone was enough to force athletes into submission with gender norms, forcing them to behave compliantly and remain in their traditional "place" to avoid further or worse harassment.

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<sup>143</sup> Thompson, interview 7, pp. 3-4.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid.

While Hayashi and Thompson reported the sexual harassment they endured, many women did not. For instance, Michelle Ferez remembered a teammate who was sexually assaulted but did not file a report.<sup>145</sup> This silence is understandable for two reasons. First, during the 1970s and 1980s, there were few places a young woman could go to report sexual and gender-based violence. Colleges had only begun to develop reporting mechanisms, and Title IX had yet to cover sexual assault and harassment. Second, the very nature of sexual harassment can silence survivors, who often blame themselves or feel too intimidated or humiliated to report the behaviour.<sup>146</sup> The silencing of survivors indicates why sexual harassment and violence were particularly powerful means of backlash during this period; there was little an athlete could do to stop it, and even when they tried, their fears and experiences were often dismissed, misinterpreted, or denied.<sup>147</sup> Ultimately, sexual harassment and violence served as a tool to push back against the increased presence of female basketball players, and female athletes more broadly, on intercollegiate campuses.

In the first two decades of Title IX's mandate, women's basketball players experienced a fierce social backlash to their growing visibility and acceptance in American society. Driven by a desire to maintain hegemonic masculinity and men's dominance over sports, undergraduates and the media told women athletes that their sport was less interesting and worthwhile than the men's game. Moreover, female basketball players were exposed to heterosexist stereotyping that functioned to help preserve the traditional norms of femininity. Yet, female athletes, their coaches, and the game's rule makers also made attempts to play up femininity, developing an apologetic that points to the psychological power of the backlash. Finally, women's basketball players

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<sup>145</sup> Ferez, interview 6, p. 10.

<sup>146</sup> Jody Jessup-Anger, Elise Lopez, and Mary P. Koss, "History of Sexual Violence in Higher Education," *New Directions for Student Services* 2018, no. 161 (Spring 2018): p. 9; Bogart and Stein, "Breaking the Silence," p. 147.

<sup>147</sup> Bogart and Stein, "Breaking the Silence," p. 147.

experienced sexual violence and harassment, a powerful tool within that backlash that functioned to intimidate young women into compliance with traditional gender roles. These factors of the backlash ensured a state of persistent social discrimination towards female athletes, shaping the experiences of the women who stepped onto intercollegiate courts between 1972 and 1992.

### **Misogynoir On and Off the Basketball Court**

For Black athletes, the misogynistic backlash to Title IX's expansion of women's sports was compounded by another virulent social force: racism. Although neither the backlash to Title IX nor the law itself were responsible for the race-based discrimination that Black women athletes encountered, the law thrust talented young Black women into conditions where they were more vulnerable to such discrimination. Indeed, Black female athletes were placed into situations in which racism and sexism were very much in play during the early Title IX era.

During the 1970s, intercollegiate sports gradually grew more diverse in terms of race and ethnicity. Integrating college athletics was a significant civil rights victory, but it created new problems for Black student-athletes and the athletics programs at historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs). Because of long-standing disparities in funding between HBCUs and predominantly white institutions (PWIs), integration proved detrimental to the growth and development of athletics programs at HBCUs. Once they were able to attend any post-secondary school in America, many Black athletes opted for the established, high-level sports programs and full-ride scholarships at PWIs rather than attend the less well-funded, less competitive HBCUs.<sup>148</sup> But Black students, and therefore Black student-athletes, remained an extreme minority at PWIs, accounting for only four percent of the student body at the NCAA's 291 Division I institutions by

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<sup>148</sup> Billy Hawkins, *The New Plantation: Black Athletes, College Sports, and Predominantly White NCAA Institutions* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p. 45.

1987.<sup>149</sup> Integration unintentionally funnelled talented Black athletes who wanted to play college sports at the highest level into PWI programs, isolating them from people who looked like them or shared similar social experiences.

By mandating gender equity in college athletics, Title IX inadvertently ensured that many Black female basketball players suffered the same isolation on all-white campuses. PWIs, not HBCUs, developed the highest calibre women's programs and offered the best scholarships, drawing talented athletes—Black and white—to their campuses. But like their male counterparts, Black women were represented on intercollegiate basketball teams at rates disproportionate to their enrolment at PWIs. For example, during the 1986-87 school year, only 329 Black women attended Alabama's Auburn University, making up just 1.6 percent of the undergraduate student body. Yet sixty-four percent of Auburn's women's basketball team was Black.<sup>150</sup> This discrepancy not only reveals the isolation of Black women athletes, it also suggests that it was only possible for Black women to be enrolled at PWIs if they were athletes. While Title IX afforded female athletes the opportunity to play high-level intercollegiate basketball, it had the unintended consequence of isolating Black sportswomen on predominantly white campuses and making them more vulnerable to racist treatment.

Black women were often confronted with racism in their basketball programs. Racial prejudice can be seen in the composition of many women's basketball rosters, where around sixty-five percent of the competitors were white.<sup>151</sup> Most of the narrators remembered there being few

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<sup>149</sup> William C. Rhoden, "Many Black College Athletes Express Feelings of Isolation," *New York Times* (April 6, 1989), p. 1.

<sup>150</sup> "Total Enrollment by Gender and Race/Ethnicity Selected Fall Terms, 1976-2022," Factbook – Historical Enrollment, Auburn University, last modified November 18, 2022, <https://auburn.edu/administration/ir/factbook/enrollment-demographics/historical-summaries/enrollment-gender-ethnicity.html>.

<sup>151</sup> Rhoden, "Many Black College Athletes Express Feelings of Isolation," p. 1.

Black or minority women on their teams.<sup>152</sup> Lisa Clarke recalled that her team at Maryland's TSU was "primarily white all four years I was there...we were all kind of from similar backgrounds."<sup>153</sup> Michelle Ferenz, who played for EMC, also remembered the lack of racial diversity on her team, saying, "we were pretty homogeneously white."<sup>154</sup> So, even though Black women were overrepresented in college basketball, they were sometimes one of the only non-white members on their squads, which isolated Black women on white teams on white campuses. The overrepresentation of Black women in intercollegiate basketball exposed these women to racial prejudice in another way. While they were overrepresented as student-athletes on PWI campuses, they were rendered practically invisible as regular students, perpetuating the racist stereotype that Black women and men were unintelligent and were enrolled in university solely for athletic purposes.<sup>155</sup>

Even when women's basketball rosters were diverse, coaching staffs were not. All ten narrators remembered that their coaching staffs were either entirely white or mostly white, with one or two Black assistant coaches. For instance, Black women were the majority on LSU's 1989/90 and 1990/91 rosters, but all seven members of the team's coaching staff were white.<sup>156</sup> This lack of Black coaches further demonstrates racial prejudice in intercollegiate basketball. Athletic directors at AIAW, NCAA, and NAIA institutions were not hiring Black coaches. And because Black athletes accounted for thirty-three percent of the game's participants, the absence

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<sup>152</sup> Between 1975 and 1992, Black Americans accounted for about eleven to twelve percent of the general U.S. population. See U.S. Census Bureau, *We the Americans: Blacks* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1993), p. 2.

<sup>153</sup> Clarke, interview 4, p. 7.

<sup>154</sup> Ferenz, interview 6, p. 10.

<sup>155</sup> John B. Diamond, "Still Separate and Unequal: Examining Race, Opportunity, and School Achievement in 'Integrated' Suburbs," *The Journal of Negro Education* 75, no. 3 (Summer 2006): p. 501.

<sup>156</sup> LSU Athletics, *2017-18 LSU Women's Basketball Media Guide* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University, 2018), p. 87. <https://issuu.com/lsuathletics/docs/1718wbb-mediaguide-web>.



of Black coaches suggests that, while Black women were allowed to provide the “talent,” they were blocked from holding positions of authority, reserved for white men and women.<sup>157</sup>

The lack of diversity in coaching had consequences for Black women’s basketball players. Black athletes experienced racist treatment at the hands of their white coaches. Evelyn Thompson recalled an uncomfortable incident where she was “in the office and the person that I was dating came to pick me up. The person that I was dating happened to be not a Black person, but a white person... He did whatever he was doing and then he’d come and pick me up...My coach says to me, ‘Oh yeah, Evelyn, I heard you like the white boys.’”<sup>158</sup> Thompson’s coach clearly made an inappropriate comment about her race, implying that it was strange for her to be dating a white man. Yet, his comment also suggested that he was considering Thompson’s sexual availability to men like him—older, white men with power. In effect, Thompson’s coach, as well as her previously-mentioned stalker, was casting her in the role of a jezebel, a Reconstruction-era stereotype of Black women that painted them as a “whore,” and appeared to believe that she was looking for any “white boy” and would be willing to date one in exchange for access to white privilege.<sup>159</sup> Comments such as these contributed to the sense of isolation and discomfort felt by Black athletes, who frequently reported feeling like outsiders on predominantly white campuses.<sup>160</sup> Indeed, racism was inflicted from within basketball programs, oftentimes by white coaches.

Racist incidents were not limited to gymnasiums and locker rooms. Black athletes experienced race-based discrimination beyond athletics, from classrooms to convenience stores. At Auburn, Evelyn Thompson remembered a professor telling her that she was “the first Black

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<sup>157</sup> Rhoden, “Many Black College Athletes Express Feelings of Isolation,” p. 1.

<sup>158</sup> Thompson, interview 7, p. 22.

<sup>159</sup> Grace E. Hale, *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890-1940* (New York: Vintage Books, 1998), pp. 32, 104.

<sup>160</sup> Rhoden, “Many Black College Athletes Express Feelings of Isolation,” p. 1.

person I've ever had in my class." Thompson did not take this comment as a point of honour. Instead, her professor's statement made her deeply uncomfortable, implying that she did not belong in that course.<sup>161</sup> Black female athletes faced racist stereotypes about their intelligence from both professors and students. While the notion of the 'dumb jock,' the idea that athletic and academic talent were incongruent, affected all athletes, Black competitors were especially vulnerable to such stereotypes.<sup>162</sup> As Michelle Ferez explained, her Black teammates fielded assumptions about what African Americans were "really like," including ideas that they "weren't smart" and assertions that they would not be at college if they "didn't have athletics."<sup>163</sup> Stereotypes about Black athletes' intelligence served to discredit the athletic and academic achievements of Black women, reinforcing the idea that they were only on campuses to play sports and did not belong in academic settings. The social isolation was, therefore, compounded by racist stereotypes that questioned the intelligence of Black athletes, consistently reminding Black women's basketball players of their "otherness" at PWIs.

Black athletes also endured racist treatment off-campus. Reflecting on her time playing basketball at Oklahoma City University (OCU), Denise Hannah recalled that

A great many of my teammates were African American and we had quite a few...that were from Colombia, South America. We would face a lot of discrimination because of their language barrier. When we would go out somewhere in Oklahoma, obviously in the 80s you're facing a lot of discrimination and racism. But when we'd go out somewhere in the community and I'd have to translate...we would get dirty looks, or we would be ostracized. We'd get called the N word.<sup>164</sup>

Hannah also remembered "going to other schools in smaller, rural towns of Oklahoma where there were no African Americans" and facing "racism and less than favorable words."<sup>165</sup> As PWIs like

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<sup>161</sup> Thompson, interview 7, p. 28.

<sup>162</sup> Diamond, "Still Separate and Unequal," p. 501.

<sup>163</sup> Ferez, interview 6, p. 10.

<sup>164</sup> Hannah, interview 5, p. 5.

<sup>165</sup> Hannah, interview 5, p. 5.

OCU tended to be in predominantly white cities or towns, Black athletes were not only isolated on their rosters and campuses, but in the places where they attended school and played away games. So, the social isolation of Black athletes was often three-fold, leaving them vulnerable to racism from their teammates and coaches, their classmates and professors, and members of the public.

While Title IX nor its backlash were responsible for the racist treatment endured by Black female basketball players, young Black women were placed onto the campuses of PWIs after Title IX forced institutions to offer women's sports . Black hoopers were socially isolated at white schools, leaving them vulnerable to racist stereotypes, microaggressions, and blatant oppression on their campuses and in the broader community. Not only did these young women endure the same misogynistic treatment as their white teammates, but they were also forced to reckon with anti-Black racism.

### **Conclusion**

By making women athletes more numerous and visible, perceptions about women in sport were changed during the Title IX era. But America's views of female athletes did not change immediately; and women's basketball players were often perceived as a threat to traditional understandings of gender. Indeed, the increased visibility of female athletes provoked a backlash, ensuring a state of persistent social discrimination. This backlash affected women's basketball players in several ways. For one, female hoopers were trivialized and marginalized by their peers and the media, which served as a reminder that their sport was seen as less interesting and worthwhile than men's pursuits. Female basketball players were also exposed to heterosexist stereotyping that functioned to help preserve the traditional norms of femininity, such as lesbian labelling, describing some athletes as "unladylike," and the sexist naming practices for women's teams. Female athletes, their coaches, and the game's rule makers also made attempts to play up

femininity, engaging in an apologetic that indicates the backlash's psychological impact on sportswomen. Moreover, women's basketball players witnessed or experienced sexual violence and harassment, a powerful tool within that backlash that functioned to intimidate young women into compliance with traditional gender roles. For Black women, the sex discrimination that cropped up in reaction to Title IX's expansion of women's sports was compounded by anti-Black racism. Thrust onto the campuses of PWIs, talented female Black athletes were forced to reckon with misogynoir in the intercollegiate athletics system. Thus, the backlash to Title IX was felt by women's basketball players in many forms of social sex discrimination.

The discrimination faced by women's basketball players continued past 1992. Athletes at the high school, college, and professional levels continue to be trivialized, marginalized, and berated with sexist stereotypes about their skill, sexual orientation, and gender identity. Yet as the next chapter will show, despite the backlash-caused social discrimination, Title IX created profoundly positive impacts in the lives of women's basketball players in both the short- and long-term.

## Chapter Three: Women's Basketball Players' Positive Experiences under Title IX

Reflecting on her intercollegiate basketball career, former Lenoir-Rhyne hooper D'Ann Williams described how her coach

really worked with me on changing the way that I shot the basketball. Because of the time that he took to really show me how to shoot the ball correctly, I now can shoot a basketball much more consistently. I played basketball from the time I was in sixth grade until I was in high school, and nobody ever commented on the fact that maybe I wasn't shooting the ball correctly...What's interesting, though, is that during the second year of basketball when he became the coach and changed my shot, I didn't have a good shooting season...I was no longer the high scorer on the team. But then after I quit playing basketball, I could shoot the ball perfectly and was much more consistent.<sup>166</sup>

D'Ann's story offers an interesting metaphor for how Title IX impacted the lives of the young women playing intercollegiate basketball between 1975 and 1992. Her coach, like Title IX, endeavoured to improve her situation; the changes had undesirable consequences at first, but were more positive in the long run. Similarly, while Title IX might have changed these women's "shots," the backlash to the law meant that the first two decades of its mandate might constitute a subpar "shooting season." But the opportunity to play basketball competitively, and the experiences, lessons, and outcomes that came with it, were deeply valued by the women who participated in college basketball during this period. And because Title IX instigated the rapid expansion of women's athletics, more young women than ever before had their lives enriched by intercollegiate sports.

It has been argued by some that Title IX was a detriment to women athletes, thrusting them into a toxic, hyper-competitive and hyper-commercial environment mirroring that of men's intercollegiate sports. Journalist Welch Suggs has led this line of critique against the

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<sup>166</sup> Williams, interview 1, p. 9.

antidiscrimination law, arguing that the real “tragedy” of Title IX was that women athletes and their coaches immersed themselves in competition and commerce, thereby distorting or entirely forgetting Mabel Lee’s ideals of worthy citizenship “at the expense of fine technique.”<sup>167</sup> Suggs is not entirely wrong. Women’s intercollegiate athletics *did* become more competitive under Title IX. But his assertion that this movement to a more competitive game was a net negative for women does not take into account how female athletes themselves felt about this shift.

Contrary to Suggs’ argument, the testimony of women who played college basketball suggests that the increasingly competitive nature of women’s sports after Title IX’s passage was not harmful in the ways he suggested. Suggs asserted that this rise in competition was problematic for female athletes because it placed the focus on winning over participating, fashioning an intense, high-stakes environment that did not protect nor help athletes. But women’s basketball players insisted that they wanted to win and play in more competitive games. These women wanted to be *real* athletes; they wanted to be seen as fierce competitors, just as their male counterparts had long been. Suggs also claimed that the higher level of competition led female athletes to forget the values their pioneers once hoped athletics would instill, but women’s basketball players tell a different story. According to them, highly competitive athletics taught the same lessons in discipline, leadership, teamwork, self-esteem, and community as athletics under the old participatory model. And thanks to Title IX, more women than ever before were able to reap these benefits of intercollegiate play. Based on the testimony of athletes, then, the increasingly competitive nature of women’s athletics under Title IX should be seen as more triumph than tragedy.

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<sup>167</sup> Suggs, *A Place on the Team*, p. 10.

This chapter explores the positive experiences of women’s basketball players under Title IX, despite the financial inequities and social discrimination they simultaneously endured. Based on women’s basketball players’ own testimony, Title IX had a positive impact in three major ways. First, the law made it possible for many young women to receive a free education based on their athleticism. Moreover, as more women played intercollegiate basketball, the sport became more competitive, which young women had long desired. Finally, by expanding women’s opportunities to play sports, Title IX allowed more women than ever to have their lives enriched by the experience of competing on an intercollegiate basketball team, which taught them the value of teamwork, leadership, and being coachable, as well as discipline, accountability, and determination. Those skills in turn prepared a generation of female athletes for careers in and beyond athletics. These positive experiences suggest that with more consistent and enthusiastic enforcement, Title IX could have had much more impact on women’s basketball players.

### **Getting a “Free” Education**

Perhaps the most obviously positive impact of Title IX was that it meant female athletes, like their male counterparts, could have their educations paid for by sports. As discussed earlier, intercollegiate basketball provided most of the women who played it with subsidized or entirely free educations at some of the nation’s best colleges and universities. Without Title IX, Evelyn Thompson believed she “wouldn’t have had the opportunity to get a free education [and] come outta college debt free.”<sup>168</sup> There were both short- and long-term benefits associated with receiving an athletic scholarship. Athletic-based grant-in-aid gave young women the opportunity to have the cost of a university degree fully or partly covered, having an immediate positive impact on their lives. Moreover, scholarships set up women’s basketball players for long-term financial health,

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<sup>168</sup> Thompson, interview 8, p. 34.

ensuring they would not be burdened by student loan debt. By guaranteeing athletic scholarships for female athletes, Title IX positively impacted the lives of women's hoopers both during and after their college careers.

The college educations that women's basketball players received were not entirely "free," as Evelyn suggested. Student-athletes participated in athletics and, in turn, had the full or partial cost of tuition subsidized by their institution, meaning they were reliant on their institutions to fund their educations. Some athletes described playing basketball as "a job" that paid for school, demonstrating their dependence on their institutions to fund their education.<sup>169</sup> Yet this "job" was precarious because of the NCAA's one-year scholarship rule, which forced all full scholarships to be renewed on a yearly basis.<sup>170</sup> Therefore, if women's basketball players did not perform well enough, they were always at risk of losing the scholarship that paid for their education.

Carla Berry shared a story that exposed this interdependent relationship between athletes and their post-secondary institutions. She explained that she

could not have gone to LSU without an athletic scholarship. I'll never forget...when I first got to LSU, there was an error on my fee bill, and they charged me for being an out-of-state student. It scared the living hell outta me because my balance was \$10,000 and I didn't know what to do. I was like, 'I gotta call my mom. She's not gonna be able to afford this.' But it was just an error. I was on full scholarship, but I was afraid that I wasn't, and I had to come up with that money. I couldn't have afforded to go.<sup>171</sup>

Like Carla, many student-athletes, especially Black student-athletes, could not afford to attend a four-year university without a grant-in-aid.<sup>172</sup> In an era where the average cost of one year's tuition was between \$542 to \$2,117 at public institutions and \$2,291 and \$9,759 at private colleges, losing

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<sup>169</sup> Clarke, interview 4, p. 3; Higgs, interview 8, p. 8.

<sup>170</sup> Gordon S. White Jr., "N.C.A.A. Scraps 1.6 for a Scholastic Ruling," *New York Times* (January 14, 1973), p. 1.

<sup>171</sup> Berry, interview 9, p. 9.

<sup>172</sup> Hawkins, *The New Plantation*, pp. 94, 148.



one's scholarship could force a student to drop-out or transfer to a less expensive institution.<sup>173</sup> However, Carla's story also points to Title IX's positive impact. Although she was dependent on her institution to fund her education, playing basketball gave her the chance to attend and graduate from a prestigious institution that she may not have otherwise been able to afford. Earning an athletic scholarship therefore had an incredibly positive impact on the lives of women's basketball players.

Athletic scholarships were the most visible way in which women's basketball players benefitted from the enactment of Title IX. Long available to male athletes, athletic scholarships allowed young women to use their athletic prowess to cover the cost of their educations. While there were some issues associated with scholarships, such as the precarity created by one-year scholarships and the dependence athletes had on their institutions for funding, the fact that women could receive athletic scholarships was an undeniably positive impact of Title IX's mandate for gender equity in college sports.

### ***A Rise in Competition***

Title IX dramatically increased young women's opportunities to play intercollegiate basketball, allowing more female athletes than ever before to play the sport competitively past adolescence. As more women took to college courts, and as institutions allocated dollars for women's athletic programs, the older participatory model gave way to the competitive model that emphasized winning. In the twenty years after Title IX's passage, women's basketball grew to mirror the character of the men's game, with young women playing in a very competitive environment.

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<sup>173</sup> Melanie Hanson, "Average Cost of College by Year," Education Data Initiative, last modified January 9, 2022, <https://educationdata.org/average-cost-of-college-by-year>.

Fears about the growing competitiveness in women's basketball quickly bubbled up. These concerns were rooted in the norms of traditional femininity, which dictated that women were not ruthless or aggressive, nor should they strive to win.<sup>174</sup> In 1974, Donna Miller, a women's physical educator, pondered whether female athletes "want[ed] equal pressure to win" as sportsmen.<sup>175</sup> Yet the answer to Miller's question appears to have been an overwhelming "yes." The testimony of women's basketball players reveals that female athletes relished being high-level competitors. The increased level of competition in women's sports was a success of Title IX from their point of view, even if it did challenge old patriarchal notions of proper femininity (with all the backlash that that engendered, see chapters one and two).

Women's basketball players embraced the shift to a more competitive model of participation with open arms. This eagerness for competition was revealed through the narrators' frequent reference to "winning" as the most noteworthy aspect of their college basketball careers. According to Evelyn Thompson, the most memorable experiences for her—for any competitor—was "always the winning."<sup>176</sup> Evelyn's statement held true for most of the narrators, with eight mentioning being competitive or winning games as the most memorable and enjoyable aspects of playing basketball in university.<sup>177</sup> This emphasis on winning demonstrates that women's basketball players during this period were fiercely competitive individuals driven by the desire for victory. In contrast to traditional gender norms, these women did not mind, and were happy to be, playing sports in a highly competitive environment that expected them to win because they wanted to win themselves.

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<sup>174</sup> Andrea Paloian, "The Female/Athlete Paradox: Managing Traditional Views of Masculinity and Femininity," *Applied Psychology OPUS* (accessed April 10, 2023), [https://wp.nyu.edu/steinhardt-appsych\\_opus/the-femaleathlete-paradox-managing-traditional-views-of-masculinity-and-femininity/](https://wp.nyu.edu/steinhardt-appsych_opus/the-femaleathlete-paradox-managing-traditional-views-of-masculinity-and-femininity/).

<sup>175</sup> Miller, *Coaching the Female Athlete*, p. 10.

<sup>176</sup> Thompson, interview 8, p. 7.

<sup>177</sup> Berry, interview 9, pp. 3-4; Clarke, interview 4, p. 5; Ferenz, interview 6, p. 6-7; Hannah, interview 5, p. 3; Higgs, interview 8, pp. 4-5; Moore, interview 3, p. 3; Scott, interview 10, p. 3.

The narrators' accounts revealed their strong desire to compete at the highest level. Indeed, many expressed a sense of fulfillment and excitement about playing in a highly competitive setting. Some noted a sense of fulfillment gained from playing basketball at the highest level. For instance, while Carla Berry was not a starter at LSU, she was still able "to do what I loved at the highest level" during practice four days a week. In fact, Carla was so dedicated to playing at the highest level of competition that she refused to transfer to a school where she would get more playing time.<sup>178</sup> Other narrators remarked on the level of talent in women's basketball, signifying their excitement for the competitive nature of the intercollegiate game. At Auburn, Evelyn Thompson enthusiastically remembered playing with and against women who ended up in the Hall of Fame.<sup>179</sup> Likewise, Helen Higgs expressed enthusiasm about playing against USC, whose entire starting line "played on the national team at some point," further expressing her glee to be able to "compete at that level and be relatively successful."<sup>180</sup> For all of these women, the opportunity to play with and compete against the best teams and athletes made basketball more exciting and fulfilling, even if they were not in the starting five. These were women who wanted to be competitors; women who enjoyed the intensity, dedication, and talent required to play high-level basketball.

Higher competition, and thereby higher stakes, did have *some* negative consequences for women's basketball players. Most obviously, as expectations to win grew, female student-athletes were required to dedicate a tremendous amount of time to basketball, sometimes detracting from their student experiences. Many of the narrators recalled their schedules being "consumed" by "school and basketball," with little time left for additional extracurriculars or social activities.<sup>181</sup> Yet despite the limited opportunities to join clubs or socialize, the majority did not view their

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<sup>178</sup> Berry, interview 9, p. 3.

<sup>179</sup> Thompson, interview 7, p. 8.

<sup>180</sup> Higgs, interview 8, p. 4.

<sup>181</sup> Hayashi, interview 2, p. 3; Moore, interview 3, p. 2.

experience negatively. As Lisa Clarke made clear, “playing sports was my main passion,” so dedicating a significant amount of time to basketball was not a chore.<sup>182</sup> Although they may not have had a well-rounded college experience, the narrators did not express regret for what they missed out on. Instead, women’s basketball players appreciated the chance to play competitive college basketball under Title IX.

Female athletes continued to be seen as less athletically competitive or talented than their male counterparts. This is demonstrated by the stories that Michelle Ferenz and Helen Higgs shared of playing pick-up basketball while enrolled in college. Both women remembered having to play with men due to the lack of women’s spaces. Yet, Higgs and Ferenz’s ability to compete was overlooked or underestimated by their male competitors. Higgs recalled feeling like her gender put “at a detriment the whole time” while playing pick-up hoops because none of the men playing would select her for their team.<sup>183</sup> Moreover, Higgs and Ferenz felt that they had to *prove* that they could actually play, either by making shots or working harder than their male opponents, even though both played high-level intercollegiate basketball.<sup>184</sup> Even though their skill continued to be underestimated by some male athletes, women’s basketball players relished the opportunity to prove them wrong, showcasing their talent in a highly competitive environment.

Although it has been characterized by some as a failure of Title IX, or at least a negative cost, the rise in competition in women’s sports was a positive development for many female basketball players. As the narrators’ testimony reveals, female college athletes welcomed the shift to a competitive athletics model with open arms as they desired to be real competitors, not just participants. While the rise in competition, and therefore the stakes, in women’s basketball may

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<sup>182</sup> Clarke, interview 4, p. 3.

<sup>183</sup> Higgs, interview 8, p. 9.

<sup>184</sup> Ferenz, interview 6, p. 5; Higgs, interview 8, p. 9-10.

have decreased athletes' opportunities to be regular students, and the acceptance of sportswomen as competitive athletes lagged, Title IX afforded young women the opportunity to play a sport they loved at its highest level—that alone made the sacrifices to student experiences and instances sex discrimination worth the cost.

### **Values and Career Opportunities**

When it was first adapted for women, basketball's primary purpose was to create well-rounded individuals, instilling athletes with values and lessons that would benefit them in their daily lives. In 1901, Senda Berenson, women's basketball's most influential pioneer, declared that the game "develops physical and moral courage, self-reliance and self-control, the ability to meet success and defeat with dignity."<sup>185</sup> Though Welch Suggs criticized Title IX for increasing the competition and commerciality of women's college sports, causing female athletes to forget about the more abstract ideals of athletic participation, the testimony of women's basketball players tells a different story. When recalling their time in intercollegiate courts, women's basketball players felt that playing competitive basketball in the 1970s, 80s, and 90s continued to impart the very same qualities and traits that Berenson had outlined in 1901. And as previously discussed, Title IX's mandate for gender equity expanded women's sports dramatically, meaning more women than ever before were afforded the opportunity to reap the benefits of intercollegiate athletics after 1972. As such, one of Title IX's positive impacts was allowing more women to have their lives enriched by basketball.

Playing high-level basketball in college taught young women discipline, accountability, and determination, just as the game's pioneers had designed it to do. Denise Hannah testified that

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<sup>185</sup> Berenson, "The Significance of Basket Ball for Women," p. 37.

college basketball taught her “discipline” and “accountability.”<sup>186</sup> PJ Moore and Michelle Ferez echoed Denise’s statement, saying that playing basketball was “disciplined and intense” and gave them tangible goals that they were determined to achieve.<sup>187</sup> Lessons in discipline were not limited to the locker room. Just being on the team provided “a framework of structure,” such as a daily schedule, with which athletes were expected to comply.<sup>188</sup> Clearly, the rise in competition had not stopped basketball from imparting lessons in discipline, accountability, and perseverance to the women who played it.

Learning discipline, accountability, and perseverance from sports had positive effects on women’s basketball players’ lives. In the short term, these qualities that basketball instilled eased the transition to university-life, providing young women with a structure and teaching them how to see goals through to completion.<sup>189</sup> This structure and discipline helped young women succeed in academics, allowing them to get the most out of their free educations. In the long term, learning to be disciplined and accountable translated to women’s personal lives and careers, aiding in their professional and individual achievements.<sup>190</sup>

Competitive college basketball helped young women learn how to be better team members and leaders. To win games, women’s basketball players had to work together. Evelyn Thompson reflected on how it was necessary to work “as a collective,” because that was when her team was “capable of some phenomenal things.”<sup>191</sup> Yet without good leadership, a team could never be fully united. PJ Moore remembered a compliment she received from her coach, who lauded her for her leadership abilities, saying, “I don’t know what it is, but when I put you in the team just plays

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<sup>186</sup> Hannah, interview 5, p. 6.

<sup>187</sup> Moore, interview 3, p. 3; Ferez, interview 6, p. 6.

<sup>188</sup> Berry, interview 9, p. 2.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid.

<sup>190</sup> Hannah, interview 5, p. 6; Moore, interview 3, p. 6; Clarke, interview 4, p. 8.

<sup>191</sup> Thompson, interview 8, p. 9.

better.”<sup>192</sup> These lessons in teamwork and leadership directly shaped women’s lives. Specifically, these qualities translated directly to the American job market, which valued the leadership and teamwork that college sports imparted. Lisa Clarke, now an executive in America’s financial sector, explained that playing competitive basketball in college “helped me develop a lot of leadership skills and personal habits that helped me be successful in the business world.”<sup>193</sup> Likewise, PJ Moore credited being a “better team member and leader” to playing basketball, traits that allowed her to “have a very successful career” as a senior executive at Bank of America.<sup>194</sup> As these women’s stories show, college basketball taught skills that helped women in their lives after sport.

Playing basketball competitively also helped inspire confidence in the women who played it, the same self-esteem and “courage” the game had been designed to instill. Evelyn Thompson felt that intercollegiate basketball had given her “confidence and self-love” that shaped her “into the woman that I am today,” a woman committed to personal principles and unafraid to stand up for the truth.<sup>195</sup> Similarly, PJ Moore explained that basketball made her “a more confident person,” teaching her that she could do “anything I wanted to do.”<sup>196</sup> Through basketball, women not only learned the values of confidence and courage, but these lessons had a genuine impact on women’s lives. Playing college basketball shaped more self-assured individuals who recognized their worth and capabilities.

Moreover, playing college basketball helped young women feel more comfortable in their skin. Some of the narrators discussed being “much taller” than their female peers and feeling like

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<sup>192</sup> Moore, interview 3, pp. 3, 7.

<sup>193</sup> Clarke, interview 4, p. 3.

<sup>194</sup> Moore, interview 3, p. 6.

<sup>195</sup> Thompson, interview 8, pp. 7, 34-35.

<sup>196</sup> Moore, interview 3, p. 7.

they “stood out” because of their height. Yet, playing basketball, where height was an advantage, allowed these women to “feel good” about themselves.<sup>197</sup> As Kim Hayashi explained, playing college-level basketball allowed her to feel comfortable as “a big person” and know “the goodness of who I am.”<sup>198</sup> From these stories, playing college basketball appears to have had a genuinely positive impact on the self-esteem of young women by valuing and celebrating physical features that they had felt insecure about. Shooting hoops competitively in college taught confidence and self-acceptance, helping women feel more secure in themselves and their capabilities. And, thanks to Title IX, more women than ever before had the opportunity to derive these benefits from competition.

College basketball under Title IX benefitted women in another way the game’s pioneers might not have imagined: it provided athletes with a community—a group with whom they could instantly connect on large campuses. Michelle Ferenz called this a great benefit of being on an intercollegiate team, explaining that “you instantly have a support system. You instantly have friends... We usually had a connection before we even got there. Usually, a phone call or something where somebody reached out to you. I think that’s always been one of the benefits of team sport.”<sup>199</sup> As Michelle pointed out, being part of a team community could have an immediate positive impact on athletes, helping them make friends and have a smoother transition to university life.<sup>200</sup> Joining a basketball team gave young women a group with whom they could instantly connect, providing them with a way to fit in and feel comfortable on college campuses that were still predominantly male. Having this community also had long-term benefits for women’s basketball players. Many of the narrators reminisced on the “good friendships” they had with their

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<sup>197</sup> Ferenz, interview 6, p. 4.

<sup>198</sup> Hayashi, interview 2, p. 14.

<sup>199</sup> Ferenz, interview 6, p. 2.

<sup>200</sup> Higgs, interview 8, p. 2.



teammates, explaining that they were still friends with many of the women they played with.<sup>201</sup> Intercollegiate hoops gave these women important friendships, some of which have lasted for more than forty-five years.

Basketball had positive impacts on women's lives in other ways, too. The experience and connections gained from playing intercollegiate sports enabled tens of thousands of young women to secure their future careers. Intercollegiate basketball helped prepare women's basketball players to enter male-dominated careers both within the sports industry and beyond it. Playing the sport provided young women with experience and connections that enhanced their job prospects. After graduating from college, coaching was the main sports-related career available to women athletes. Playing intercollegiate basketball helped women become coaches in several ways. For one, young women realized that they could be, and wanted to be, coaches. Michelle Ferenz, who coaches Whitman College's women's basketball team, explained that she had originally wanted to be a lawyer, but discovered that she "was good at" coaching thanks to her college basketball career.<sup>202</sup> Evelyn Thompson, the head women's basketball coach at Cleveland State Community College, said that she "followed my purpose" because of her playing career.<sup>203</sup> The career paths of these women demonstrate that playing basketball gave women the chance to realize that they *could* coach sports and that they *wanted* to coach sports, jobs which they have found greatly fulfilling.

Playing basketball in college provided young women with the background needed to coach professionally. After the NCAA's absorption of the AIAW, it became increasingly difficult for women to land head coaching positions on women's teams. Prior to 1972, over ninety percent of coaches were female. By 1992, women accounted for 63.5 percent of head coaches in women's

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<sup>201</sup> Ferenz, interview 6, p. 12.

<sup>202</sup> Ibid.

<sup>203</sup> Thompson, interview 7, p. 35.

basketball.<sup>204</sup> This shift can be partly attributed to the growing popularity and profitability of women's basketball, which placed a greater emphasis on coaches' qualifications and experience in intercollegiate sports—a coach needed to be perceived as “adding something” to a program thanks to the new levels of competitiveness in women's basketball and the growing importance of women's sports to university athletics departments' bottom lines after Title IX.<sup>205</sup> Early in the Title IX era, few women had the same level of coaching and playing experience in intercollegiate sports as men. However, as more women gained experience playing intercollegiate sports under Title IX, they became more qualified and better equipped to coach professionally, having years of playing experience, college degrees, and even championship rings to their names. With this experience, women like Evelyn, Helen, Carla, and Michelle were able to find coaching jobs in the women's game, even as the field became more male-dominated. As such, playing intercollegiate basketball improved a women's chances of pursuing a coaching career, pointing to Title IX's positive impact on the lives of female athletes, both those who became coaches and the young women they coached.

Playing basketball also provided young women with connections that helped them secure jobs in male-dominated fields. Women have historically faced obstacles when seeking employment in male-dominated sectors; when men controlled hiring decisions, they were more likely to employ other men with whom they felt more comfortable working.<sup>206</sup> In fact, women comprised thirty-six percent of corporate America's management positions as of 1985, though they held less than five percent of executive positions up until the end of the 1990s.<sup>207</sup> Playing

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<sup>204</sup> R. Vivian Acosta and Linda J. Carpenter, *Women in Intercollegiate Sport: A Longitudinal, National Study: Thirty-Seven Year Update* (2014), p. 22. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED570882.pdf>.

<sup>205</sup> Peter Alfano, “Signs of Problems Amid the Progress,” *New York Times* (December 15, 1985), p. 1.

<sup>206</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>207</sup> George Guilder, “Women in the Work Force,” *The Atlantic* (September 1986); Belle R. Ragins, “Gender Gap in the Executive Suite; CEOs and Female Executives Report on Breaking the Glass Ceiling,” *The Academy of Management Executive* 12, no. 1 (Feb. 1998): p. 28.

intercollegiate basketball enabled some young women to establish connections and networks that helped them overcome sexist hiring practices. For instance, Lisa Clarke got her first job in finance through an introduction made by Towson's head football coach. Similarly, Carla Berry secured a job as an assistant coach at LSU under her former head coach, Sue Gunter.<sup>208</sup> By leveraging the connections they made while playing basketball, both women were able to obtain positions that might have been otherwise difficult to get. In this way, intercollegiate basketball under Title IX had a long-term positive impact on the lives of the women who competed in it, and the law's mandate for equity enabled more women than ever before to reap the benefits of college sport.

One thing women's basketball players could not do for most of the 1970s and 80s was play the game they loved professionally after college. For most of these years, a professional women's league did not exist in the United States, which bothered the women playing the sport at the college level. As PJ Moore and Denise Hannah made clear, women athletes had to reckon with "doing something different, rather than continuing the sport you love," while their male counterparts could play, or at least dream of playing, in the National Basketball League (NBA).<sup>209</sup> Some women did play professionally overseas, usually in the International Basketball Federation's Women's European or Asia Cup, and often cited it as "a great experience."<sup>210</sup> But PJ's statement demonstrates that, for many basketball players, playing abroad was not a viable or enticing option. Of course, Title IX cannot be faulted for this lack of opportunity—the law did not have jurisdiction over private industry. While women's basketball players longed for opportunities to play professionally in America, Title IX could not mandate the creation of a professional women's league comparable to the NBA.

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<sup>208</sup> Clarke, interview 4, p. 3; Berry, interview 9, p. 6.

<sup>209</sup> Moore, interview 3, p. 3; Hannah, interview 5, p. 5.

<sup>210</sup> Jim Reilly, "That Scholarship Changed My Life Forever," *WNBA.com* (c. 2012), [https://www.wnba.com/archive/wnba/features/teresa\\_edwards\\_072512.html](https://www.wnba.com/archive/wnba/features/teresa_edwards_072512.html).

What *was* preventing the formation of a professional women's basketball league in America? For the most part, it was the social backlash to Title IX and its expansion of women's sports. This is made clear by the story of the Women's Basketball League (WBL), an American professional league founded in 1978. The WBL grew out of the rising popularity of women's intercollegiate basketball among athletes and spectators, but it faced significant challenges related to the gender of its athletes. The WBL struggled to attract players, offering meager salaries of less than \$5,000 that players "wouldn't even consider" accepting, highlighting the lack of financial support for women's sports.<sup>211</sup> To put this in perspective, the average full-time female worker earned around \$28,600 annually at the time.<sup>212</sup> Thanks to the continuing lack of interest in women's sports and the prejudice faced by female athletes, the WBL was unable to draw enough fans to remain viable.<sup>213</sup> It closed its doors in 1981, after just three seasons of professional play.

Though the WBL was unsuccessful, its mere existence demonstrated Title IX's positive impact on women's sports. By expanding and raising the profile of women's sports, Title IX led to the existence of the first professional basketball league for women in the United States. As such, women's basketball players were, for the first time, given the chance to pursue their love of basketball professionally on American soil. Though the backlash to Title IX and its expansion of women's sports caused delays in the movement towards equity, the WBL's brief existence reveals that the tide *was* turning for women's sports and female athletes. Title IX was having, and would continue to have, a positive impact on American female athletes' lives and opportunities.

Playing intercollegiate basketball had a profound impact on the lives of its young players, imparting character-building lessons and shaping career opportunities. As the narrators' testimony

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<sup>211</sup> Festle, *Playing Nice*, p. 251.

<sup>212</sup> Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, "Women's Earnings, 1979-2012," *The Economics Daily*, accessed April 9, 2023, [https://www.bls.gov/opub/ted/2013/ted\\_20131104.htm](https://www.bls.gov/opub/ted/2013/ted_20131104.htm).

<sup>213</sup> Festle, *Playing Nice*, p. 262.

reveals, basketball continued to teach young women discipline, accountability, determination, teamwork, leadership, and confidence despite the growing level of competition and commerciality. Basketball also provided college athletes with a community on their college campuses, providing a safe space in which these young women could transition to adulthood. These values, along with the professional and personal connections made in college locker rooms, carved pathways to careers in and beyond athletics. Though professional playing opportunities remained scarce, the women included in this study credited playing basketball in college with their professional opportunities in corporate boardrooms and college gymnasiums.

### **Conclusion**

Women's basketball players had positive experiences under Title IX. Though political and social backlashes ensured some bad experiences, female athletes' opportunities for play were dramatically increased and enhanced college-level athletics during the early Title IX era. Most obviously, young women had the opportunity to earn athletic scholarships, which helped to cover the cost of a university education. Though athletes could be placed in precarious positions by scholarships, dependent on their institutions for educational funding that was renewed on a yearly basis, earning grants-in-aid allowed women to receive an education without accruing student loan debt. Women's basketball also shifted towards a more competitive model, which female athletes welcomed with open arms. While the rise in competition forced young women to dedicate more time to basketball, thereby diminishing their student experiences, the game's athletes appreciated the opportunity to play basketball at the highest level and expressed a deep desire to win games and play in championship tournaments. Moreover, female basketball players had more opportunities than ever before to have their lives enriched by collegiate play, with the game imparting lessons in discipline, leadership, teamwork, and confidence; providing a community that

eased the transition to university; and setting its athletes up for careers in and outside of athletics by allowing them to make connections and learn values crucial to the job force. On the whole, the intercollegiate athletics environment under Title IX allowed young women to grow and prosper, despite continued barriers to full equity.

On the topic of equity in athletics, the lack of professional playing opportunities did not persist much past 1992. Four years later, the Women’s National Basketball Association (WNBA) was founded, at last providing women’s basketball players with the opportunity to play professionally in the United States. While the WBL failed to convince Americans that they should care about women’s basketball, the WBNA has successfully carved out a place for female hoopers in the American sports industry. Today, the league’s twelve teams draw in around \$60 million dollars, with the average player earning \$147,745.<sup>214</sup> The WNBA’s revenues are still dwarfed by the NBA’s, indicating that women’s sports are still far from full equality. Yet the WNBA’s success demonstrates the significant progress made under Title IX to raise the status, visibility, and acceptability of female athletes. In 2023, Americans are willing to support and celebrate women’s athletics—there *has* been positive change under Title IX.

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<sup>214</sup> Sara Tidwell, “WNBA Salary, Contracts: How Much Money Do Women’s Basketball Players Make?,” *The Sporting News* (April 10, 2023), <https://www.sportingnews.com/us/wnba/news/wnba-salaries-2023-rookies-compared-nba/aaz024nlakdbvi0x91rfoir7#:~:text=The%20league's%20target%20revenue%20goes,leagues%20in%20the%20same%20sport>.

## Conclusion

During Title IX's first twenty years, the athletic experiences of women's basketball players were deeply impacted by a political and social backlash to the law. Powering this backlash were two strong forces: the desire of the male-dominated intercollegiate sports establishment to maintain the dominance of men's sports; and notions of hegemonic masculinity and femininity, which the expansion of women's athletics threatened to undermine. As a result, female hoopsters encountered systems of formal and informal sex discrimination, despite Title IX's protection.

Financially, women's basketball teams received less support than men's programs, shaping an environment in which women were encouraged to participate in college-level sports but struggled with limited resources. The political backlash to Title IX had tangible effects on women's basketball players. As the backlash weakened Title IX and its enforcement, college athletics departments, predominantly controlled by men who were devoted to their profit-generating men's programs, felt emboldened to disregard compliance with the law. Moreover, the NCAA's takeover of women's athletics allowed the organization to protect the primacy of men's athletics while seemingly supporting sportswomen. Consequently, female basketball players confronted various financial disparities, including unequal access to facilities, differences in tournament structuring, dramatically dissimilar budgets for travel, coaching, and recruitment, and scholarships. To cope with the financial discrimination they experienced, young women involved in intercollegiate basketball adopted several different strategies. Some confronted sex-based discrimination directly, using Title IX to launch legal battles or demand fairer treatment from their athletics departments. Others chose to rationalize or deny the persistent disparities, likely feeling helpless in the face of backlash-induced enforcement issues. Ultimately, men's basketball retained

its pre-eminence in the intercollegiate sports landscape while women's teams grappled with a discouraging climate of inadequate financial support.

Socially, many Americans were slow to truly support women's basketball, often treating women's basketball players in ways that maintained traditional understandings of gender. Between 1975 and 1992, women's basketball players experienced informal sex discrimination, which was an aspect of the backlash to Title IX, in several ways. Female hoopsters were trivialized and marginalized by their peers and the media, perpetuating the perception that their sport was less significant and interesting than men's basketball. Those playing the game also encountered heterosexist stereotyping, such as lesbian labelling, describing some athletes as "unladylike," and the sexist naming practices for women's teams, which functioned to preserve the traditional norms of femininity and masculinity. In response, some of women's basketball's athletes, coaches, and rule makers attempted to emphasize femininity, reflecting the psychological impact of the backlash on women in sports. Additionally, women's basketball players witnessed or experienced sexual violence and harassment, which served as a powerful tool to them into conforming to traditional gender roles. For Black women, the sex discrimination stemming from the reaction to Title IX's expansion of women's sports was compounded by anti-Black racism. Thrust onto the campuses of PWIs, talented female Black athletes were forced to reckon with misogynoir in the intercollegiate athletics system. So, the backlash against Title IX manifested in part as social sex discrimination that aimed to maintain the subordination of women's basketball players to their male counterparts and to preserve traditional understandings of gender.

Nevertheless, women's basketball players derived significant benefits from the implementation of Title IX and the opportunities it offered to participate in competitive sports at the college level. Among the advantages was the novel availability of athletic scholarships for



female athletes, which covered the cost of a university education. Although scholarships placed athletes in a somewhat precarious position, as they depended on their institutions for annual renewal, they allowed women to pursue higher education without accumulating student loan debt. Title IX also brought about a shift in the women's basketball landscape, prompting the rise of a more competitive model that was welcomed by female athletes. While the increased level of competition demanded greater dedication to basketball, thereby diminishing their student experiences, the game's athletes appreciated the chance to play basketball at the highest level and expressed a strong desire to win games and play in championship tournaments. Yet Title IX's most positive impact on female basketball players lies in the fact that it enabled more young women than ever before to enrich their lives through collegiate play. Those who played basketball between 1975 and 1992 benefitted from basketball in multiple ways: the game instilled lessons in discipline, leadership, teamwork, and confidence; it provided a community that eased the transition to university; and it prepared athletes up for careers both within and outside of athletics by fostering connections and teaching values essential for the workforce. Title IX had a profoundly positive impact on women's basketball players, shaping an intercollegiate athletics environment in which they flourished despite the persistent barriers to achieving full equity.

Ultimately, Title IX and its backlash must be judged, despite their entanglement, as separate entities. Many of the alleged "shortcomings" of Title IX were in fact consequences of the negative reaction to the law and its expansion of women's sports. The mistreatment of female basketball players by their institutions, peers, the media, and the public was not the result of Title IX itself, but rather of the visceral reaction it provoked in those who preferred to uphold men's dominance over athletics and conventional gender norms. To understand the shortcomings of the

*law*, it is crucial to attribute the consequences of the *backlash* to the individuals, institutions, and organizations who were actually responsible.

### **Limitations & Opportunities for Future Research**

Due to the small size of the study group, this research was limited in its representation of the diversity of female basketball players. While the sample group roughly accounted for the racial makeup of women's basketball between 1975 and 1992, none of the narrators identified as neither Black nor white. As a result, this thesis does not address the experiences of female athletes of non-white, non-Black backgrounds. Also, only one of the narrators openly identified as lesbian, which limited the ability of this study to reconstruct historical experiences in athletics related to sexuality. This thesis also only briefly addressed social class as it pertained to the intercollegiate athletics landscape, leaving room for future study into the relationship between class, gender, and college sports. Indeed, future researchers might consider interviewing narrators of other races or sexualities, and addressing experiences related to class.

The oral history testimony gathered for, and used as evidence in, this thesis should be a valuable resource for future study. These documents encompass a wide range of topics pertaining to the field of social history, including the educational experiences of female athletes, the psychology of sportswomen, feminism and intercollegiate athletes, the experiences of Black Americans, and the experiences of women in America. The transcripts might be used as evidence in research on any these topics. Future research using the testimonies may also be conducted using a social memory approach. What do these interviews reveal about the collective memory regarding Title IX? What can they tell us about what former athletes remember about their college careers, and how are they remembered? The interview transcripts would serve as valuable resources in answering these types of questions.

## *Title IX Today*

Women’s sports have experienced tremendous growth in the fifty years since Title IX’s enactment. In 2022, 3.46 million American girls played high school and college sports, marking a 1156 percent increase since 1972.<sup>215</sup> Moreover, there are now *more* women’s teams than men’s teams competing at each level of NCAA play.<sup>216</sup> It is undeniable that the landscape of women’s sports has been utterly transformed in the Title IX era.

But Title IX could not, and has not, resolved all the issues raised by misogyny, the patriarchy, or the sexist backlash to women’s sports. Today, American girls continue to have fewer chances to play sports in high school than their male peers—a gap that exists at the college-level, too, since women’s sports tend to be individual or have considerably smaller roster sizes. The bulk of attention and funding continues to be funnelled towards programs for boys and men, leaving girls’ teams with reduced access to high-quality facilities, equipment, and coaching.<sup>217</sup> This prioritization of men’s athletics could be seen during the NCAA’s 2021 National Basketball Championships. While the men’s tournament’s weight room was filled with rows of weights and training equipment, the sixty-four women’s teams involved in the Championship were expected to share a single set of dumbbells and some yoga mats. Though the NCAA issued an apology after

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<sup>215</sup> Statista Research Department, “Female Participation in U.S. High School Sports, 1992-2022,” Statista, last updated December 8, 2022, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/197591/female-participation-in-us-high-school-athletic-programs/>; Statista Research Department, “Number of Student Athletes in the United States in 2022, by Gender,” Statista, last updated March 23, 2023, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1098761/student-athletes-by-gender/>.

<sup>216</sup> National Collegiate Athletic Association, *NCAA Sports Sponsorship and Participation Rates Report (1956-57 through 2021-22)* (Indianapolis, IN: National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2022), p. 95.

<sup>217</sup> “Do You Know the Factors Influencing Girls’ Participation in Sports?,” Women’s Sports Foundation, accessed May 5, 2023, <https://www.womenssportsfoundation.org/do-you-know-the-factors-influencing-girls-participation-in-sports/>.

photographs of the disparity went viral on Twitter, the incident revealed that women’s sports still are not taken as seriously as men’s programs.<sup>218</sup>

Female athletes also continue to experience social discrimination. The lesbian labelling of the 1970s and 1980s persists in the 2020s, causing many girls and women to avoid participation in athletics.<sup>219</sup> When female athletes display supposedly “masculine” characteristics like competitiveness or aggression, they are still critiqued for their rebuke of feminine ideals. For instance, during the 2023 NCAA Women’s March Madness tournament, LSU’s star forward Angel Reese was lambasted by sports journalists as a “classless piece of shit” and a “fucking idiot” for trash talking and gesturing—actions that are encouraged, or at least tolerated, when performed by male athletes.<sup>220</sup> Reese’s treatment was eerily similar to that faced by Cheryl Miller in the 1980s, called “not necessarily a lady” by *Sports Illustrated* for her on-court activities simply because they oozed of a traditionally “masculine” trait: competitive aggression. It is worth noting that both Reese and Miller are Black, adding a racial dimension to the misogyny targeted at them. Forty years after the demise of the WBL, female basketball players are still confronted with sex discrimination in intercollegiate sports, revealing how tremendously the backlash has impeded Title IX’s long-term success. Indeed, the history of Title IX shows that the passage of antidiscrimination laws is never the end of the fight for equality. In some ways, it is only the beginning.

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<sup>218</sup> Meredith Deliso, “NCAA apologizes to women’s basketball players for weight room disparity,” *ABC News* (March 19, 2021), <https://abcnews.go.com/Sports/ncaa-apologizes-womens-basketball-players-weight-room-disparity/story?id=76563430>.

<sup>219</sup> “Do You Know the Factors Influencing Girls’ Participation in Sports?”

<sup>220</sup> Dave Portnoy (@stoolpresidente), “Classless piece of shit,” Twitter, April 2, 2023, <https://twitter.com/stoolpresidente/status/1642648843010428931?lang=en>; Keith Olbermann (@KeithOlbermann), “What a fucking idiot,” Twitter, April 2, 2023, <https://twitter.com/KeithOlbermann/status/1642649593140637706>.

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# Appendices

## Appendix A: Letter of Information to Potential Participants

**Project Title:** Women's College Basketball's First Wave of Scholarship Athletes and their Experiences on American College Campuses, 1975-1990

**Principal Investigator:**

Dr. Laurel Shire, PhD, Department of History

**Co-Investigator:**

Meredyth Dwyer, Department of History

### 1. Invitation to Participate

You are being invited to participate in this research study about scholarship women's college basketball players' experiences as students and athletes on American college campuses between 1975 and 1990 because you received an athletics scholarship to play women's college basketball at some time during this period.

### 2. Why is this study being done?

The purpose of this study is to examine how women's college basketball players, specifically those who received the first wave of athletics scholarships under Title IX, experienced life on American college campuses.

### 3. How long will you be in this study?

It is expected that you will be in the study for one to two weeks. There will be two study visits on Zoom or telephone. The first visit will take approximately 15-30 minutes. The second visit will take approximately 60 to 90 minutes. Time between visits is dependent on your schedule, but is expected to be no longer than 14 days after the first visit.

### 4. Study Procedures

If you agree to participate, you will be interviewed about your experiences as a student-athlete. The pre-interview will take 15-30 minutes; the interview will take 60-90 minutes. With your consent, the interview will be audio and/or video recorded. If you do not wish to be recorded, notes will be taken by hand. You may choose whether your real name or a pseudonym is used in the transcripts of the interview, as well as in the thesis paper generated from the data collected during the interview and the analysis of this data. Interviews will take place over Zoom or telephone. There will be approximately 12 participants in this study.

### 5. Possible Risks and Harms

There are no anticipated risks associated with participating in this study. Nevertheless, it is possible that you may experience stress when recounting your experiences from college. If you experience distress or are overwhelmed, the interview will be paused.

## **6. Possible Benefits**

Information gathered from your participation in this study may provide a better understanding of women student-athletes' experiences playing college basketball on athletic scholarship during the 1970s and 1980s, drawing a greater picture of Title IX's impacts on gender equity and discrimination. However, you may not directly benefit from participating in this study.

## **7. Can participants choose to leave the study?**

If you decide to withdraw from the study, you have the right to request (e.g., by phone, in writing, etc.) withdrawal of information collected about you. If you wish to have your information removed, please let the researcher know and your information will be destroyed from our records. Once the study has been published, we will not be able to withdraw your information.

It is important to note that a record of your participation must remain with the study, and as such, the researchers may not be able to destroy your signed letter of information and consent, or your name on the master list. However, any data may be withdrawn upon your request.

## **8. Confidentiality**

Delegated institutional representatives of Western University and its Non-Medical Research Ethics Board may require access to your study-related records to monitor the conduct of the research in accordance with regulatory requirements

This study will use Zoom to conduct interviews. Zoom's privacy policy can be found here: <https://explore.zoom.us/en/privacy/>. Data on Zoom is stored in the United States. Please be advised that nothing over the internet is ever 100% safe. Like online shopping, teleconferencing/videoconferencing technology has some privacy and security risks. It is possible that information could be intercepted by unauthorized people (hacked) or otherwise shared by accident. This risk cannot be completely eliminated. We want to make you aware of this.

To fully understand your experience playing basketball in college, identifiable information will be collected, including your name, where you attended college, and your personal testimony, and disclosed in dissemination. The research team will have access to this data. While we do our best to protect your information there is no guarantee that we will be able to do so. The inclusion of your personal data in the dissemination of the results may allow someone to link the data and identify you. You have the option to consent to use of name and use of direct quotes in dissemination.

The researcher will keep all personal information about you in a secure and confidential location for 7 years. Your contact information will be kept by the researcher in a secure place, separate from your study file. If you choose to use a pseudonym in this study, a list linking your pseudonym with your name and contact information will also be kept by the researcher in a secure place, separate from your study file.

Interview data will be archived in the Western University Department of History, meaning this data may be accessible to students, faculty, and other researchers. Other researchers may request access to the data collected in the interview for future research purposes. If you agree to share your interview data for future research purposes, it is expected that researchers will analyze this data to better understand Title IX and women's college basketball; however, it is impossible to predict all ways this interview data could be analyzed in the future. Your contact information will not be shared with researchers outside of the present study team. Please indicate your consent to this possible future use on the consent form prior to signing.

## **9. Compensation**

You will not be compensated for your participation in this research.

## **10. Rights of Participants**

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may decide not to be in this study. Even if you consent to participate you have the right to not answer individual questions or to withdraw from the study at any time. If you choose not to participate or to leave the study at any time it will have no effect on you. You do not waive any legal right by consenting to this study.

## **11. Whom do participants contact for questions?**

If you have questions about this research study, please contact Meredyth Dwyer or the principal investigator, Dr. Laurel Shire.

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Office of Research Ethics by phone at (519) 661-3036 or email at [ethics@uwo.ca](mailto:ethics@uwo.ca). This office oversees the ethical conduct of research studies and is not part of the study team. Everything that you discuss will be kept confidential.

## **12. Consent**

If you agree to participate in this research project and accept the conditions outlined above, please sign the attached consent form and return it back directly to me before the interview.

Thank you for your participation.

Sincerely,  
Meredyth Dwyer (Co-Investigator)

*This letter is yours to keep for future reference.*

## **Consent Form**

**Project Title:** Women's College Basketball's First Wave of Scholarship Athletes and their Experiences on American College Campuses, 1975-1990

**Principal Investigator:** Dr. Laurel Shire, Department of History, Western University

**Co-Investigator:** Meredyth Dwyer, Department of History, Western University

I have read the Letter of Information and have had the nature of the study explained to me. All questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

I agree to participate in the study:

Participant's Name (please print): \_\_\_\_\_

Participant's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

I agree to have the interview audio-recorded (please initial): YES \_\_\_\_\_

NO \_\_\_\_\_

I agree to let the researcher use titles, names, or other identifying information within the publication (please initial):

YES \_\_\_\_\_

NO \_\_\_\_\_

I agree to let the researcher use personal quotes, whether they be directly identifiable or not, within the publication (please initial):

YES \_\_\_\_\_

NO \_\_\_\_\_

I consent to the use of my data for future research purposes (please initial): YES \_\_\_\_\_

NO \_\_\_\_\_

Person Obtaining Informed Consent (please print): \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## **Appendix B: Interview Guide for Initial 30-Minute Interview**

**Project Title:** Women's College Basketball's First Wave of Scholarship Athletes and their Experiences on American College Campuses, 1975-1990

### **Interview Questions:**

1. Do you have any questions about this study before we conduct the full interview?
2. When will you be available to conduct the full interview? Please indicate 1 to 2 dates and times within the next two weeks.
3. Would you like to conduct the full interview over phone or Zoom?

## Appendix C: Interview Guide

1. What is your age?
2. Which gender do you identify with most?
3. How do you racially identify?
4. How do you ethnically identify?
5. What years did you attend college?
6. What college/university did you attend?
7. Did you receive an athletics scholarship to play college basketball?
  - a. Potential follow-up questions:
    - i. If so, what years?
    - ii. If so, did you receive full or partial grant-in-aid to play college basketball?
    - iii. Did you receive any other scholarship to attend university?
8. How far from home did you travel to attend university and play basketball?
9. What were your experiences with transitioning to life on your university's campus?
10. Did you live in a campus dorm?
  - a. Follow up questions:
    - i. If yes, what were those experiences like?
    - ii. If no, where did you live? What were those experiences like?
11. What program(s) or department were you enrolled in while at college?
12. Did you participate in any clubs, sports, or extracurriculars other than basketball?
  - a. If yes, what were they?
  - b. If yes, how did you balance these other extracurriculars with basketball?
  - c. If no, why not? What other extracurriculars would you have liked to participate in?
13. What were your experiences as a student?
14. What were your experiences as an athlete?
15. What were some of the most memorable experiences you had while at college, as an athlete and as a student?
16. What did you enjoy most about playing basketball in college?
17. What did you enjoy least about playing basketball in college?
18. Were there any accomplishments from college that you are especially proud of?
  - a. Follow up question:
    - i. If so, what were they?
19. What were your experiences with gender equity in college athletics?
20. What were your experiences with your team's coaching and training staff and the athletics administrators?
21. What were your experiences with and attitudes towards male college athletes?
  - a. Follow up:
    - i. What were your experiences with and attitudes towards male college basketball players specifically?
22. What were your experiences with gender expectations and gender-based discrimination on and off the basketball court?
23. What were your experiences with discrimination on and off the court, whether this discrimination was based on gender, racial, ethnic, class, or other kinds of difference?
24. What were your experiences with gender-based and sexual violence or harassment?
25. When did you learn about Title IX?



- a. Follow up questions:
  - i. (If they learned about Title IX before or during college) What were your attitudes towards this legislation while you were in college?
- 26. Did you consider yourself a “feminist” while you were in college? Why or why not?
- 27. Did you ever connect women’s basketball and its athletes and coaches with second wave feminism? Why or why not?
  - a. Follow up:
    - i. Did anyone around you (teammates and coaches, male athletes and coaches, administrators, classmates, etc.) connect women’s basketball and its athletes and coaches with second wave feminism? This could be in either a positive and/or negative way. Why do you believe that is?
- 28. From your current perspective, how did Title IX impact your experiences as a college student and athlete?
- 29. How did Title IX impact your life in the short- and long-term?
- 30. Are there any other stories that you would like to share?

## Curriculum Vitae

**Name:** Meredyth Dwyer

**Post-secondary Education and Degrees:** McGill University  
Montreal, Québec, Canada  
2017-2021 B.A.

The University of Western Ontario  
London, Ontario, Canada  
2021-2023 M.A.

**Honours and Awards:** First Class Honours in History  
McGill University  
2021

Distinction  
McGill University  
2021

Dean's Scholarship  
University of Western Ontario  
2021-2022

**Related Work Experience** Teaching Assistant  
The University of Western Ontario  
2021-2023

Guest Lecturer, HIS 2311G  
The University of Western Ontario  
2023