

# Social Justice and Men's Interests

## The Case of Title IX

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Men's superordinate status sets the stage for them to understand their interests as opposed to those of women. But hierarchies among men complicate this. Through an examination of the narratives by critics of Title IX at the U.S. Secretary of Education's 2002 hearings on Title IX, the authors argue that subordinated groups of men within sports (i.e., those in vulnerable "nonrevenue" sports like wrestling, tennis, and gymnastics) tend to articulate their interests as congruent with men in central, privileged sports (football and basketball). But this articulation of men's interests does not take the form of antiwoman backlash. The critics tell stories of individual men who are victimized by the "unintended consequences" of liberal state policies—stories that rest on an essentialist assumption that men are naturally more interested in sports than are women. The critics' language of bureaucratic victimization of individual men—especially as symbolized by the threatened "walk-on"—may find especially fertile ground among young white males, who face a world destabilized by feminism, gay and lesbian liberation, the civil rights movement, and shifts in the economy.

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It is foundational to a sociology of superordinates that groups of people who are differently situated in a system of hierarchies have different interests in social continuity and social change (Goode, 1982; Kimmel & Ferber, 2003). It follows that feminist challenges that push for greater institutional sex equity run counter to men's collective interests. A structural perspective suggests that men's collective interests flow from their shared superordinate positions: "A gender order where men dominate women cannot avoid constituting men as an interest group concerned with defense, and women as an interest group concerned with change" (Connell, 1995, p. 82). Men's collective interests are expressed "through the routine functioning of the institutions in which the dominance of men is embedded—corporations, churches, mass media, legal systems, and governments" (Connell, 2002, p. 144). Through these routine institutional arrangements, men as a group tend to take for granted their right to a "patriarchal dividend," which includes access to a surplus of economic resources, as well as "authority, respect, service, safety, housing, access to institutional power and control over one's life" (Connell, 2002, p. 142).

We would add sport to Connell's (2002) list of institutions through which men have historically reaped a patriarchal dividend. Men have maintained a privileged position and a long-standing sense of entitlement to the majority of athletic resources. However, "The patriarchal dividend is the benefit to men *as a group*. Individual men may get more of it than others, or less, or none, depending on their location in the social order" (p. 142). So, when women challenge institutional arrangements that have ensured men's access to this privileged position, how do marginalized or subordinated men—those who have enjoyed little or no patriarchal dividend—respond to this challenge?

One way to begin thinking about this question of men's interests is to invoke the now-common observation that in speaking about "men," we may be falsely universalizing a group and oversimplifying the idea of "men's interests." Scholarship on masculinities has long grappled with this dilemma: how to retain the feminist critique of men's global power and privilege over women while appreciating the considerable inequalities and differences among men (e.g., Brod, 1987; Carrigan, Connell, & Lee, 1985). Most analyses of multiple masculinities have invoked the familiar trilogy of social class, race/ethnicity, and sexual orientation. These intersectional theories of power and inequality remind us that "multiple masculinities" are not simply different masculine "styles" but are based on complex group-based relations of power and different—sometimes contradictory—relations to material interests.

A look at sport and recent debates about Title IX suggests that an understanding of additional configurations of masculinities may help us grapple with the intricacies of difference and group interests. Research has demonstrated that, within the gender regime of sport, men construct hierarchies of masculinities based on race, class, and sexual orientation (Anderson, 2002; Carrington, 1998; Messner, 1992). We want to suggest an additional dimension of difference: Hierarchy in men's sport is also based on different kinds and levels of bodily capital that boys and men develop for different sports. The team sports that require and valorize large, muscled bodies that engage in aggressive contact or violent collision (i.e., basketball and football) occupy the "center" of the U.S. men's sports world and enjoy the lion's share of the privileges and resources. Boys and men in marginal sports often have very different experiences of sport; some of them are overtly insulted—even assaulted—by boys and men in the central sports, being placed into subordinate roles that are coded as feminine (Anderson, 2002). Thus, theoretically, we might expect them to have very different interests in maintaining or challenging the existing hierarchies within sport and between sport and other institutions like schools.

Sport, then, is not patriarchal in a simple, seamlessly binary fashion—males versus females. Sport is male-dominated, but it is also constructed through a hierarchy of masculinities and a very unequal distribution of resources and privilege among boys and men: star athletes over benchwarmers, athletic directors and head coaches over assistant coaches and players, and athletes and coaches in central sports (especially football) over those in marginal "minor" sports (like cross-country, swimming, gymnastics, wrestling, and golf).

But marginal boys' and men's subordinate social location with respect to privileged football and basketball programs does not automatically translate into the participants identifying their interests as aligned with those of girls and women against the gluttony of "major" men's sports programs. As in many other situations, an academic assessment of a group's interests, based simply on identifying the group's social location within a hierarchy of privilege and subordination, is rarely a good predictor of the group's political consciousness or actions. An analysis of "men's interests" cannot simply be reduced to a rational analysis of men's material interests in maintaining their patriarchal privilege. As Bob Pease (2002) argued,

People do not have objective interests as a result of their location; rather, they *formulate* . . . their interests, and they do so within the context of the available discourses in situations in which they are located and that they coproduce. (p. 170)

One such "available discourse," as it pertains to school sport, is the 2002 U.S. Department of Education's public hearings about Title IX. These discussions offer an opportunity to examine the ways that the spokespeople for men's sports articulate their interests in a highly politicized forum. In what follows, we will draw from the testimony at the 2002 hearing that we attended in San Diego, California, and at which we both spoke (as pro-Title IX advocates) during the public comments period. We draw from our own notes, taken at the hearing, and from the official public transcripts of the hearing.<sup>1</sup> For our purposes here, we will focus primarily on the various strategies employed by the critics of Title IX, most of whom spoke for groups and organizations that represented men in "marginal" sports that claimed to have been weakened or threatened by the enforcement of Title IX. We will first provide a brief overview of the significance of the 2002 hearings, in the context of the legal history of Title IX. We will then describe the major patterns in the narratives of the critics of Title IX and analyze these patterns as a way of shedding light on how spokespeople for marginalized groups of men—at least in the context of sport—understand and articulate their interests. We will argue that spokespeople for marginalized boys' and men's sports articulated their interests in a way that supports the interests of dominant groups of men over women *and* over other men.

### **Title IX and the 2002 Hearings**

Title IX of the Education Amendment of 1972 is a one-sentence law barring sex discrimination in all programs of an educational institution that receives federal financial assistance.<sup>2</sup> Since Congress enacted Title IX, girls' and women's involvement in sports has increased exponentially. According to the National Federation of State High School Associations, in 1972 girls were only 7.4% of high school athletes, but by 2003, they were 41.7%. Additionally, the federal General Accounting

Office reports that colleges have added nearly 3,800 more women's teams since 1972. Advocates of Title IX argue that this increase in sports participation by females demonstrates that discrimination, and not lack of interest, accounted for the historically low athletic participation rates of women (Acosta & Carpenter, 2002; Carpenter, 2001).

Despite the growth opportunities for women and girls in sports, inequity still exists. Women make up more than half of the undergraduates in college and universities, but they represent just 42% of college varsity athletes nationwide. "In fact, female participation in intercollegiate sports remains below pre-Title IX male participation" (National Women's Law Center, 2002a). Furthermore, although women in Division I colleges make up more than half of the student body, they receive only 43% of athletic scholarship dollars, 32% of recruiting dollars, and 36% of operating budgets (National Women's Law Center, 2002b). Despite the continued lack of opportunities and discrimination against women and girls in sports, a perception exists that the increase in female participation opportunities has resulted in cuts in male sports, and a vigorous backlash against Title IX's athletic regulations persists and has swelled in the past few years.

At the center of the backlash against Title IX has been controversy surrounding the highly publicized cuts of men's sports in various colleges and universities. The advocates of men's sports (especially wrestling and gymnastics programs) have claimed that Title IX has led to a decline in opportunities for men to play certain sports. The "culprit," in their mind, is the "three-part test" outlined in a 1979 Policy Interpretation on Title IX that is used to determine whether a school is providing equal athletic participation opportunities to its students. Schools can comply with this test by satisfying one of three prongs: (a) by having roughly the same proportion of male and female athletes on teams as they have males and females in the student body, known as "substantial proportionality"; (b) by having a "history and continuing practice" of expanding opportunities for the underrepresented sex; or (c) by "fully and effectively accommodating the interests and abilities" of the underrepresented sex.

On June 27, 2002, the U.S. Department of Education established the Commission on Opportunity in Athletics. The purpose and functions of the Commission, according to its charter, was

to collect information, analyze issues, and obtain broad public input directed at improving the application of current Federal standards for measuring equal opportunity for men and women and boys and girls to participate in athletics under Title IX. The Commission will recommend to the Secretary, in a written report, whether those standards should be revised, and if so, how the standards should be revised.

Between August and December 2002, the 15-person Commission held five "Town Hall meetings" (in Atlanta, Chicago, Colorado Springs, San Diego, and Philadelphia), hearing testimony and gathering information to prepare a January 2003 report for the secretary of education. The formation of the commission set off

a firestorm of public debate and an impressive level of mobilization. On one side were spokespeople for men's "minor" sports (especially wrestling, but also tennis and gymnastics) that have declined in number in recent years. On the other side was an array of advocates of girls' and women's sports (including the Women's Sports Foundation, legal advocates, women coaches, and women and girl athletes).

Women's sports advocates viewed the commission as the first step in a Bush administration attempt to weaken or dismantle Title IX's regulations. To support this conclusion, advocates first noted that none of the appointed commissioners represented high schools. The focus was almost entirely on Division I-A universities with elite, "big-time" athletics programs. By limiting the focus in this manner, the issue of revenue-producing sports was overly emphasized in the testimony and factors considered by the commission (de Verona & Foudy, 2002). Girls' experience in primary and secondary schools was all but ignored. Second, women's sports advocates protested the very assumptions underlying the formation of the commission, which was charged with examining whether current Title IX standards for assessing equal opportunity in athletics are working to promote opportunities for both male and female athletes. Advocates of Title IX saw this inquiry as a "loaded" question because Congress enacted Title IX, an antidiscrimination statute, to ensure equal opportunities for the underrepresented sex. Given the historical discrimination against females in school sports, the underrepresented sex was, and continues to be, female students. Finally, most of the discussion at the hearings focused specifically on the 1979 Policy Interpretation of Title IX, which outlined the three-part test used to determine equity in sports participation opportunities. By limiting the inquiry in this manner, the commission all but ignored other areas of discrimination that relate to the continued inferior treatment and benefits female athletes receive even after they are given the opportunity to participate in sports.

### **The Critics' Narratives**

At the San Diego hearing, we identified several common elements in the critics' statements. We will begin to introduce these themes with a somewhat extended excerpt from the statement by Jon Vegosen, a Chicago attorney representing the U.S. Tennis Association, the governing body for tennis in the United States, and the Intercollegiate Tennis Association, the governing body of college tennis:

We support the tremendous strides that women have made through Title IX, and we want to preserve those gains. We are also concerned about its unintended consequences for both men and women, not only with regard to collegiate tennis programs, but also concerning the adverse impact that Title IX can have on minorities and grassroots tennis programs. . . . Tennis is truly a gender blind sport. At the college level there are dual meet matches for both men and women varsity players, with an equal number of tournaments and draw sizes. . . . The message is clear, there are no differences between the

sexes. There is, however, a profound difference in the gender message at the collegiate level in terms of scholarships and participation. For example, the men's varsity tennis team in a fully-funded Division I school has only 4 1/2 scholarships, the women's team has 8. Most of the men's varsity rosters have a squad limit of 8 players, and the women's roster can have 12. . . . Another disturbing consequence of Title IX has been the adverse impact on walk-ons. I was a walk-on at Northwestern and became captain my junior and senior year, and I was the first player to be selected at Northwestern to the All Big Ten Team. I experienced valuable life lessons, including goal-setting, time management, teamwork and travel. Today that wouldn't happen. . . . I would be told, "Thanks for your interest, but there's no room for you," and that's what thousands of male athletes in tennis and other sports are told every year. They are turned away, while women's tennis teams struggle to fill their rosters. . . . It is critical to appreciate the long-term impact of the unintended consequences of Title IX for tennis. If these trends continue, men's collegiate tennis will be jeopardized. If that occurs, we will see a devastating effect for minorities and at the grassroots level for girls as well as boys.

Vegosen's statement contained all of the major themes that we heard repeated in various forms by the Title IX critics. The themes are intertwined and can be summarized as follows:

1. We applaud the growth of girls' and women's sports, and we have no intention of trying to turn back the clock on this progress; however, we are critical of Title IX's "unintended consequences."
2. Compliance with the Title IX three-part test is illogical, because it ignores the fact that males have higher levels of interest in playing sports than do females.
3. Cuts in men's sports disproportionately hurt poor and minority males, who often find sports to be their one avenue to college scholarships.

We will next discuss these themes in terms of our main question about how men's interests are articulated.

### **Title IX's "Unintended Consequences": Male Victimization by Quotas**

Nearly every critic of Title IX began with a statement of support for women's sports and for what they saw to be the original intent of Title IX. They did not want to turn back the clock, they emphasized. They just wanted men to be treated fairly. Critics regularly appropriated conservative language from familiar anti-affirmative-action narratives about government-enforced "quota systems" that result in "reverse discrimination." For example, Sam Bell, president of the National Track and Field Coaches Association, criticized the "politically correct roster management" under Title IX as a "quota system" that was set up "in order to satisfy someone's bean counting in Washington." Speaking of the controversial "substantial proportionality" prong of the three-part test, Rick Bay, San Diego State University athletic director, stated,

It is ironic that while the motivation for the genesis of Title IX was to eliminate discrimination against women, Title IX must now depend on a discriminatory benchmark of its own to validate its desired results . . . whether we'd like to admit it or not, proportionality is a quota system.

Bay's inclusion as an invited speaker was especially illuminating because he is an athletic director who had recently made the decision to cut a men's sport, volleyball (and its \$150,000 annual cost) from his budget. Bay said that he did not blame women's sports for this "difficult choice." But, he went on to say, he had made this decision because, faced with a need to cut expenditures from his budget, the "unintended consequences" of Title IX imposed a "quota system" on him that left him no choice but to cut a men's sport. "The by-product of this system," Bay asserted, "is that we have reached a point where women's interest in sports are dictating men's opportunities."

Commissioner Donna De Verona then questioned Bay, stating that she had done "a little research" about the San Diego State University Athletic Department. The previous year they had spent "\$4,720 for [football] helmet decals, \$40,720 for 600 pairs of Nikes, and \$37,796 for hotel rooms and buses on nights before football home games." Faced with Bay's need to trim expenses from the athletic department budget, De Verona observed, "You cut the volleyball team rather than reduce the five million dollar football budget [which was] one million more than the twelve-sport women's sport program budget." Then she asked Bay directly, "Did you consider that maybe you could look at these [football] expenditures and fund volleyball, bring back men's volleyball for next season?" Bay responded to this line of questioning by asserting the dominant logic of big-time college athletic programs:

Well, football is the one sport . . . that actually generates more money than is spent, and as a result it helps fund all the other sports, including women's sports. . . . Our football budget is pretty modest by competitive standards, and so we're trying to keep our revenue sports relatively strong so that they can generate revenue. So yes, we could have—to answer your question, Donna, I wish we could have sliced \$150,000 out of the football budget that you mentioned, but it would have reduced our capability to be competitive in football, which would have in turn reduced our capability to generate revenue to help support all the sports, including the women's programs.

In the San Diego State case, when faced with the option to trim the football budget by 3%, or to eliminate the entire men's sport of volleyball, the internal logic of the athletic department dictated the latter decision. The interests of the football coaches and players are protected by this logic; meanwhile, the interests of men in other sports are put at risk, and then when these men's sports are cut, women's sports are scapegoated. This is precisely how privilege operates—often unmarked and invisible (Kimmel & Ferber, 2003). The problem with this logic, however, is that for the vast majority of schools, "revenue-producing" does not mean "profit-producing."

Most football programs—even many of the college football programs that are tied in to the big television dollars—lose money (NCAA, 2000; Zimbalist, 1999). They do not support themselves, let alone other sports teams at their schools. Moreover, the existence of a big-time college football program seems to create conditions that make gender equity *less* rather than more likely: A study that assessed U.S. colleges' and universities' levels of compliance with Title IX found that, after 25 years of Title IX, institutions with big-time football programs were on average *the least likely to be in compliance with gender equity laws* (Sabo & Women's Sports Foundation, 1997). Schools with big-time football programs often spend twice as much on football programs as on all women's sports (Eitzen, 1999; Sperber, 2000).

The male-headed football lobby continues to be one of the most powerful groups behind the mobilization against gender equity in U.S. sports. High school and college football programs have successfully labeled themselves as “revenue-generating sports” and have thus created a mostly false image of themselves as geese that lay golden eggs. The successful imposition of an image of the football program as the beneficent supporter of the rest of the athletic department has given the football lobby the leverage it needs to attempt to position itself *outside* the gender equity debates. In effect, they argue that gender equity calculus should consider three categories of sports: women's sports, men's sports, and football. There have been efforts over the past 30 years to exempt revenue-producing sports from the reach of Title IX's sex equity requirements. However, Congress and the courts have consistently held that the opportunities provided to male athletes on a football or basketball team should not be ignored simply because such sports currently have the ability to generate revenue.

### **Men's “Natural Interests” and the “Walk-On” as Victim**

Though it is usually not directly stated, the idea that males are biologically programmed to be more interested in sport underlies much of the criticism of Title IX's equal participation requirements. After all, if interest in sport is in our nature, then any attempt at gender equity is by definition futile, as schools would be forced to create ever-increasing participation opportunities for females who will never want to play in the same proportion as their male counterparts. One way in which advocates for men's minor sports express this belief is to both laud and then lament the loss of the idealized male “walk-on” participation opportunities that are “tragically” lost to Title IX's equity requirements.

A “walk-on” is a college student who is neither recruited to play sports nor given an athletic scholarship but who shows up and tries out for the team. Chuck Neinas, founding president of the American Football Coaches Association, launched a defense of the supposedly threatened interests of walk-ons as the centerpiece of his presentation to the commission. Roster management under Title IX, he argued, forced men's teams to go smaller and, thus, to turn away walk-ons. “Why is that important?” Neinas



asked, "Well, by golly, kids like to try out and be a member of the team." Similarly, Sam Bell, president of the National Track and Field Coaches Association, told several stories of past "walk-on" athletes who had become successful in various ways. He then delivered a passionate defense of the walk-on, as threatened by Title-IX roster management, and concluded, "We will lose a lot of this type of student athlete if we stay with quotas, with a quota mentality."

The walk-on is a powerful image, we suggest, because it invokes the romantic ideal of the student-athlete as an untarnished amateur who loves the purity of sports. The invocation of this romantic ideal obscures the increasingly negative public image of the scholarship athlete in big-time college sports: He is viewed as spoiled by privilege; he is often in legal or academic trouble; he is not fully deserving *as a student*; and—crucially—in the public image, he is African American (Cole, 2001). The walk-on, by contrast, is first and foremost a *student*, who just happens to love sports. He does not seek fame and fortune; he just wants to be on the team. He is also, in the public imagination—like the character in the popular film *Rudy*—an admirably hard-working (albeit athletically limited) *White guy*. Thus, the critics' foregrounding the image of the walk-on, we suggest, is an accomplishment of political rhetoric: without mentioning race, White males are positioned as "regular kids," victimized by liberal policies gone amuck. The critics' image of the walk-on reveals the "unintended" victimization of White males as irrational, unfair, and un-American. The invocation of the walk-on, then, taps in to and reiterates familiar and highly charged sexist *and* racist anti-affirmative-action narratives.

The critics' defense of the male walk-on emphasizes these male students' willingness to play under any conditions, impliedly compared to those female athletes who will only play under certain specified conditions. For example, Charles M. Neinas' defense of the walk-on was premised on his assertion that "there are surveys which indicate that males are more anxious to participate in athletics without receiving aid than females." Kimberly Schuld, special assistant to the commissioner at the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, and former director of external relations at the conservative Independent Women's Forum, took the issue of differential interest as the centerpiece of her statement to the commission. Like all the critics, Schuld began by asserting that "nobody wants to cut Title IX"; however, the statute "forces schools to artificially manufacture interest" in sports among women:

We need to take into account that there are differences in interest levels in the aggregate between boys and girls and men and women. Those interest levels are not driven because society tells girls that they can't play sports. . . . Society is not telling them not to, they simply don't have the interest. . . . I would argue that it is not the proper role of the government to create interest levels. So I would encourage you to ignore the group-think and look at the individual.

Schuld's comment revealed how the more overtly conservative opposition to Title IX is part of a larger backlash against liberal government programs that aim to

decrease historical inequities. An ideology of extreme individualism is often at the heart of conservative critiques of Title IX and other public attempts to address structural inequities, like affirmative action. "Interest" in playing sports is seen, from this perspective, as an individual attribute (perhaps grounded in biology) that can be measured by social scientific survey methods.

Title IX advocates reject this conservative individualism and the potential elevation of the concept of individual "interest" that might emerge from ahistorical social science survey data. Instead, they view differential "interest levels" as being grounded in historically shifting structures of discrimination and opportunity. There is a reciprocal relationship between supply and demand for athletic opportunity; when new athletic opportunities for girls and women are provided, participation rates soar (Messner, 2002, pp. 182-183). Static "interest surveys" are likely to tell us as more about the existing structure of opportunity, and attitudes that formed as a result of past discrimination, than about what boys and girls, men and women really "want" (Sabo & Grant, 2005).

To counter the argument that Title IX is creating opportunities disproportionate to actual interest, Title IX advocates raised the issue of women's and men's collective interests in continuity and change. Donna Lopiano, the executive director of the Women's Sports Foundation, directly took on the charge that men's interests were being undermined by Title IX by invoking a schoolyard image that she called "the rule of the sandbox." "It is inevitable," she concluded, "that the previously advantaged class will be unhappy. In all civil rights laws, be it race or gender, the advantaged class perceives a loss when they must give up generations of privilege and advantage." But, Lopiano implied, this does not mean that they are being discriminated against. It means that they must learn to share the sandbox. In this statement, Lopiano neatly described a sociological phenomenon that was described by William Goode in his classic 1982 article, "Why Men Resist." When a superordinate group is even partly nudged from their position of social centrality, they often experience this as a major displacement and respond defensively.

In response to questions about the possible social and historical basis of different gender interest levels in playing sports, Kimberly Schuld revealed the biological essentialism that underlies her perspective: "Participation in those opportunities is driven by interests, and our society does not tell males what they should and shouldn't say about sports. Their biology tells them that." (Schuld's next sentence, which was an offer to "refer the Commission to some very substantial sociological and anthropological studies," was drowned out by audience laughter.)

Every court presented with the argument that one's biology determines interest and justifies disparate treatment has rejected the idea that proportionality is unfair. On the other hand, the organization of sports programs is usually based on the assumption that there are two biological sexes and that sports opportunities are best organized separately for males and females. Thus, unlike in the employment or school admissions arena, sex is a relevant characteristic in allocating athletic

participation opportunities. In an attempt to allow schools maximum flexibility to comply with Title IX, the regulations do not require schools to create duplicate athletic opportunities for males and females and allow schools to maintain sex-segregated teams. However, any analysis of sex discrimination in school sports must compare the number of athletic opportunities provided to males with that of females. Accordingly, schools are not precluded from instituting gender-conscious remedies or programs to increase female athletic opportunities. Furthermore, courts have allowed schools faced with limited budgets to reduce athletic opportunities for the overrepresented sex to comply with Title IX. Such flexibility has allowed Title IX to be a dynamic influence in promoting educational equity. The fact that opportunities for females have increased at a greater rate than those for males is not evidence that Title IX results in reverse discrimination but is, rather, an enduring example of the historical disparity in athletic opportunities provided to females.

### **Playing the Race Card**

We have suggested that “whiteness” was covertly smuggled in to the critics’ narratives via the image of the threatened male walk-on. They also wove race overtly into their narratives by claiming that another of Title IX’s “unintended consequences” is to reduce athletic (and thus educational) opportunities for underprivileged racial/ethnic minorities. Charles Neinas, for instance, praised college football and basketball for having benefited African Americans and implied that the strict enforcement of Title IX would reduce opportunities for African American males to attend college. Similarly, Jon Vegosen argued that the “unintended consequences of Title IX . . . severely reduce the opportunities for talented young American minorities” to play tennis. The critics’ expression of concern that Title IX will harm African American males is the flip-side to a common criticism that the explosion of women’s college sports has disproportionately benefited White, middle-class girls and women, while bringing more limited benefits to girls and women of color. For instance, a position paper by the Independent Women’s Forum (2003) stated that

what advocates of Title IX fail to mention is that African-Americans are losing their opportunity to participate in athletics, so that golf, equestrian, crew, and lacrosse can be added for women. But female lacrosse teams, for example, are over 87% White and less than 2% Black. Ultimately, Title IX ends up favoring upper-middle-class Caucasian women—and not helping African-American athletes who truly need financial aid to attend college. (p. 20)

A 2003 Women’s Sports Foundation study contradicted these claims. It found that since the passage of Title IX, college women athletes of color have experienced huge increases in athletic opportunities and reaped scholarship assistance at rates greater than their proportion within the athlete population. For example, the report found

that increases in participation opportunities for female athletes generally resulted in a 955% increase in participation opportunities from 1971 to 2000 for female college athletes of color.<sup>3</sup>

Moreover, when it comes to male athletes of color, their representation in NCAA varsity sports compared to their presence in the student body is proportional. When schools have reduced men's sports, more than 85% of the male teams that schools have discontinued are in sports in which males of color are moderately or severely underrepresented (Women's Sports Foundation, 2003). In addition, "more than half of the total participation opportunities added for male athletes were in sports in which male athletes of color were overrepresented" (Women's Sports Foundation, 2003, p. 6). Regardless of this data, in the context of the commission hearings, critics of Title IX strategically deployed the image of the African American male athlete's apparently threatened interests; in effect, the race card was deployed as a wedge against gender equity.

### Men's Interests and Gender Equity in Sports

This article has been concerned, broadly, with exploring how men's interests are articulated, in the context of challenges to their monopoly over power and resources in a historically male-dominated institution. In the case of public debates over Title IX, we have shown, men's collective interests in retaining a patriarchal dividend are not expressed through an overtly defensive backlash against women's sports. To do so would probably result in political suicide, due to the broad cultural shift in attitudes in favor of girls' and women's sports participation, and due to the mostly positive view that the public holds concerning Title IX. Thus, like a shorter basketball player who hopes to launch a shot against a taller opponent, the critics of Title IX begin with a good "head and shoulder fake" (praising women's sports, and stating support of the "original intent" of Title IX), before attempting to tunnel under the defender for a surprise scoop shot (claims that the unintended consequences of Title IX victimize certain men).

The critics' narratives do not mention the privileges still enjoyed by male athletes and coaches in central sports. Instead, the men in "nonrevenue" marginal sports, and/or individual men who are less athletically talented—especially the "walk-ons"—are the centerpiece of the critics' narrative, and stand in as proxy for men's threatened interests. The invocation of the image of the broken-hearted male wrestler or gymnast whose program has been eliminated is a powerful one, especially because some men's teams *have* been eliminated in recent years. Over the past 20 years, men's gymnastics and wrestling teams have declined in number. However, the critics of Title IX consistently fail to note that during this same period of time, the number of *women's* gymnastics and field hockey teams has also declined. Nor do they mention that during a period in which Title IX was not enforced in school

athletic programs because of court rulings limiting the reach of Title IX's antidiscrimination mandate to only those programs that receive directly federal funds, wrestling programs also declined.

On the plus side, whereas many college women's sports have grown in number, men's participation in college sports has increased in football, baseball, crew, lacrosse, squash, track, and volleyball. A 2001 study by the U.S. General Accounting office concluded that over the past decade, most colleges and universities added women's sports *without cutting men's sports* (Jacobson, 2001). Drawing from a wide range of empirical studies, the National Women's Law Center (2002a) concluded that

the increase in spending for men's sports has not tapered off in recent years. From 1992-1997, men's athletic operating budgets have increased by 139%. The increase in expenditures for women's sports during this time period, 89%, pales in comparison. The problem is not that Title IX has deprived men of needed athletic resources, but that the lion's share of resources that male athletes receive are inequitably distributed among men's sports. . . . Of the \$1.38 million average increase in expenditures for men's Division 1-A sports programs during the past five years, sixty-three percent of this increase, \$872,000, went to football. This increase in Division 1-A football spending during the past five years exceeds the entire average operating budget for all women's sports in 1997 by over \$200,000.

Despite these facts, the periodic high-profile cuts of men's programs tend to fuel perceptions that gender equity works against the overall interests of men. In fact, it is only possible to hold this view if one accepts the argument that all men are similarly situated in the "sports hierarchy" and refuses to include football in calculations of sex equity. Football's enormous financial drain on resources—a lion's share of scholarships; skyrocketing salaries for coaches; huge equipment, travel, and recruiting budgets—are often safely hidden behind the nickel-and-dime debates over which "nonrevenue" men's sports should be eliminated to ensure compliance with Title IX proportionality measures. The football lobby shields its own interests by backing the claims that marginal men's sports and male "walk-ons" are being victimized by Title IX.

Minor men's sports advocates participate in this debate by aligning themselves with the football (and often basketball) lobbies, despite the fact that such allegiance may seem to run counter to their apparent interests. Moreover, any claims that football expenditures should be taken seriously within the gender equity equation are likely to evoke exaggerated responses. For instance, a few years ago, the head of the American Football Coaches Association claimed that overzealous advocates of gender equity are "the enemy," who are "out to get" football. Don Sabo (1994) called this defensiveness by the most powerful sport figures "wounded giant sexism." Given their control of resources and their massive budgets, football programs can hardly claim hardship with a straight face. Rather, they have sought support for the antiequity cause from the more vulnerable "minor" men's sports. But evidence

suggests that the vulnerabilities of men's marginal sports are not due so much to the "unintended consequences" of Title IX. Rather, the vulnerability of marginal men's sports is a routine institutional consequence of the invisible and mostly unquestioned policy of affording football (and often men's basketball) programs a privileged and untouchable status.

So we return to the question of why so many marginal boys and men—and their mostly male coaches—seem to identify with the interests of the football lobby. Why do more of the men in marginalized "nonrevenue sports"—the wrestlers, tennis players, swimmers, gymnasts, cross-country athletes—not identify their interests as consistent with those of women? Nina Eliasoph (1998) argued that people "discover their interests" in every day life, but the process through which they make this discovery "is never a pure rational calculation" (p. 251). This echoes Pease's (2002) argument, introduced earlier, that men's understanding of their interests cannot be explained simply by recognizing their social location. Instead, we need to consider how men formulate their interests through interaction, in institutional contexts (Martin, 2003). In the case of the Title IX hearings, the spokesmen for men's marginal sports have most likely formulated their interests within athletic department contexts, and these contexts are characterized by professional hierarchies headed by men from the central sports of football and basketball.

Football has played a key role in the U.S. gender order over the past half century. In this feminist era, football stands in as a symbolic reference point for a general articulation of "men's interests." As Connell (1995) has pointed out, hegemonic masculinity—the dominant formation of masculinity in any historical moment—is not necessarily something that the vast majority of men fully conform to. Rather, hegemonic masculinity is a collective practice that operates as the ideological center of the current strategy for the continued global subordination of women. So, though a rational assessment of the situation of, say, boys and men who run cross-country; who wrestle, swim, play tennis; or who participate in gymnastics might suggest that their interests run counter to those of big-time football programs, more often than not, these men in marginal sports tend to identify with, and act in complicity with, the dominant discourse of the football lobby. This discourse, as we have seen, tends to invoke a language of male victimization by the state, which is seen as unfairly representing women's interests. The language of bureaucratic victimization of individual men—especially as symbolized by the threatened "walk-on"—may find especially fertile ground among today's young White males, who face a world that has been destabilized by feminism, gay and lesbian liberation, the civil rights movement, and major shifts in the economy. The resultant articulation of men's interests, then, does not take the form of a direct backlash against women's rights in sports or elsewhere. Instead, it invokes the values of individualism by telling stories of individual men who are victimized by liberal state policies that address group inequalities. And this discourse rests its case on an essentialist foundation: Individual men are just naturally more "interested" in sports than are women.

Given this common reality of marginalized boys and men developing a hegemonic conception of their interests within male-dominated institutions like sport, we wonder how it is possible that some men do develop counterhegemonic ideas, which they then act on. Many of us are aware of stories of individual men who become overnight equity activists, when they find suddenly that their daughters have been denied access to sport or have been offered substandard playing fields or unqualified coaches. In these cases, individual men clearly see their own interests as intertwined with the interests of their family members. But can this shift in the articulation of men's interests occur at the group level?

At the San Diego conference, attendees were moved by the presentation of Joe Kelly, the executive director of a national advocacy organization called Dads and Daughters. Kelly spoke strongly of the need for fathers to support their daughters to play sports and to take an active role in public issues that effect girls' access to athletic opportunities. Kelly told the commission that gender equity in sports is not only good for girls—it is good for boys and men, too:

Title IX opens doors for boys, and one of the most important ways it does is when our sons grow up to be fathers. The field of sports has long been fertile ground for strengthening fathers connected with sons, whether or not you play an organized sport, and Title IX now welcomes daughters onto that field. . . . Don't let future fathers and daughters and sons lose this precious field of play. Don't force fathers into the limited world where sons and daughters are valued differently just because of their gender. Fathers need a strongly enforced Title IX.

Kelly's speech—and the existence of his organization—suggests that it is possible for men to understand and articulate their own interests as consistent with those of girls and women, as opposed to the narrowly defined material interests of dominant men. But it takes more than men's experience in sport to allow them to make this kind of dis-identification with privileged men's interests. Boys and men come to understand and articulate their interests within institutional contexts. And it is their daily movement across and within various institutional contexts (e.g., families, workplaces, schools, sport), places that are characterized by very different, sometimes contradictory gender regimes that force boys and men to experience their interests in more complicated ways. In particular, experiences in families—especially as fully involved fathers—encourages some men to identify their own interests as consistent with those of their daughters. As a result, some fathers come to embrace the idea of “sharing the sandbox,” due to an emotional grounding in empathy for the situation for their daughters—and by extension, more generally for girls and women.

But fathering is not the only experience that can foster empathy and respect for women. Sometimes, the experience of being subordinated or bullied can lead to a shift in a group's understanding and articulation of their interests. For instance, Eric Anderson (2003) gave a poignant example of how the high school cross-country

boys whom he coached were bullied by football players and developed a consciousness that identified their interests as aligned with girls and other marginalized boys on their campus. A concrete outcome was the development of a “gay-straight alliance” that pushed to challenge privileges that high-status male athletes (and their coaches) took for granted. A positive, proactive change would be to create more non-sex-segregated activities for children (including coed sports). Integrated activities can give boys the opportunity to experience girls in ways that build respect for their abilities, and will foster the development of new beliefs about girls’ “interest” in sports and possibly their rights to equal opportunities. These kinds of experiences can provide an emotional foundation for a *dis-identification* with the narrow interests of dominant men and a commitment to take action with girls, women, and other men who are interested in building a more equitable and just world.

## Notes

1. All subsequent quotations from the Title IX hearings are drawn from the transcripts from the San Diego hearing, which can be found on the U.S. Department of Education Web Site at <http://www.ed.gov/about/bdscomm/list/athletics/thm.html>.

2. Title IX, 20 U.S.C. § 1681 reads, “No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance.” The law applies to all aspects of an educational institution’s programs or activities so long as any part of the institution receives federal financial assistance. See 20 U.S.C. § 1687.

3. This is not to say that school and university administrators should be complacent. Gender equity advocates always stress that sports opportunities and educational resources for athletes from underrepresented groups should be maintained and improved.

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