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MA THESIS

*Nők a sportban és a női sportolókkal való bánásmód
az Amerikai Egyesült Államokban*

*Women in Sports and the Treatment of Female Athletes
in the United States of America*

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2016

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By my signature below, I pledge and certify that my ELTE MA thesis, entitled

Women in Sports and the Treatment of Female Athletes in the United States of America

is entirely my own work. That is to say, the framing ideas are substantially my own and I have faithfully and exactly cited all the sources I have used, whether from conversations, books, letters, and other media, including the Internet.

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Date: 15 April, 2016

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Abstract

The following thesis paper would like to present a historical account of women's access to sports and female athletes' fight towards gender equality in the United States; to show how media representation—or the lack of it—affects and even adds to the hurdles American women face in the world of sports; and to demonstrate how female athletes' treatment is often still influenced by outdated social constructs. Sport presents a microcosm of society; therefore, it provides an area where women's progress can be measured and examined. Although several milestones have been reached since the implementation of the most important sports-related legislation in the 1970s—Title IX—there is still room to grow in the fields of participation, media representation, and general acceptance and support. Furthermore, to support the abovementioned arguments, this thesis paper will also use the example of the United States Women's National Soccer Team—in order to exhibit how the discussed factors have been affecting a globally recognized and successful professional sports team.

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1. Introduction

Women in the United States have been continuously fighting for their rights and to attain equality ever since the early 19th century. One of their first victories and the first monumental legislative action that aided the advancement of women's rights was the Nineteenth Amendment of the U.S. Constitution (in 1920), which granted women the right to vote in the U.S. elections (Flexner and Fitzpatrick). To this day, women are actively fighting to assure their equality—their treatment has come a long way from the 19th century.

The very first bill signed into law by President Barack Obama, the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act of 2009, was also related to women's rights and equality ("Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act of 2009"). Furthermore, with an executive order, President Obama also created The White House Council on Women and Girls, in order to "establish a coordinated Federal response to issues that particularly impact the lives of women and girls" and to make sure that Federal programs and policies "take into account the distinctive concerns of women and girls, including women of color and those with disabilities" ("Executive Order 13506").

Nonetheless, there is still progress to be made, especially if the ultimate goal is to achieve social, political, economic equality. According to the latest data provided by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), in 2013, the U.S. gender wage gap was above the OECD countries' average and stood at 17.90 percent—meaning that on average, for every dollar a man got paid, a woman only got 82.10 cents ("Gender wage gap"). Other research institutes place the gender wage gap at 21.40 per cent for 2014 (Hegewisch and DuMonthier 1). Moreover, the gap further widens when the wages of ethnic and racial minorities are examined (Hegewisch and DuMonthier 2).

A United Nations (UN) study, carried out in 2015, states that the United States continues to fall behind the international standards when it comes to women's rights and representations. Women represent less than 20 per cent of the U.S. Congress—albeit that

number is an all-time high for the country. The UN's biggest concerns also include the facts that the percentage of women in poverty has also increased and that women's access to health care has been limited in the last couple of years—including the restriction of their reproductive rights (“UN Working Group...”). Thus, as mentioned, the fight is still ongoing on all levels of society. Also, as seen above, there are countless sectors where the changes in the status of women can be—and has been—measured.

A probably less conventional, but also more specific, area where women's progress can be assessed and evaluated is sports—providing the focus of this paper. The purpose of this paper is to provide a historical account of women's access to sports and female athletes' fight towards gender equality in the United States; to show how media representation (and the lack of it) affects and even adds to the hurdles American women face in the world of sports; and to demonstrate how female athletes' treatment is often still influenced by outdated social constructs. While milestones have been reached, there is still room to grow—in the fields of participation, media representation, and general acceptance and support. To support the abovementioned arguments, this thesis paper will also use the example of the United States women's national soccer team (USWNT)—in order to exhibit how the discussed factors have been affecting a globally recognized and successful women's team.

2. Sports as a Microcosm of American society

Sports do not only exhibit a microcosm of society; the history of sports in the United States also mirrors American history—as, institutionally, it has been affected by the same events and realities of the times. Since the end of the 19th century, professional and collegiate sports have been just as important as the nation’s political system, media, or entertainment industry—especially when it comes to building communities and outlining the American character (Naison). Along these lines, sports have also provided an undoubtedly important outlet for a nation that has repeatedly gone through such events as the waves of migration, racial and ethnic segregation, or economic crises and changes.

Sports reflect American culture and history in undeniable ways: we can find examples of self-reliant individual athletes; teams with their own “Manifest Destiny” to rule and dominate the world of sports; athletes of minority groups overcoming obstacles; or even immigrants and their descendants achieving the American Dream through sports. Sports also provide an insight into how Americans live, entertain themselves and others, and how they confirm their place in the global community. A sport in itself might only be “just” a game, but it can echo the human experience, personal victories and defeats, the risks and trials that everyday people are experiencing (Eitzen 5). There is also a basic human desire to identify with “something bigger,” to belong somewhere, and to share allegiances with others—and sports can provide this for a society (Eitzen 6).

However, the development of women’s participation in sports have had a fairly different history than, for example, racial minorities. Racial or ethnic minorities—more specifically the men among them—were shut out of major competitions, but were still allowed to play (e.g. in all-black teams). In contrast, for even most of the past century, women were made to believe that sports belonged to men only, that sports represented a territory only for men—and that entering that realm would be inappropriate and would have a masculinizing

effect (Naison). Therefore, women received very limited chances to progress and to advance their athletic skills. As it will be pointed out later on, significant change has only arrived in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

3. Sports as a Gendered Concept

In general, linguistically and theoretically, the term “sports” is not gendered. However, more often than not, when people talk about sports, what comes to their mind (and what they talk about) is “men’s sports,” as in men doing sports (Tanner 16). Therefore, since the term “men’s sports” is rarely in use—as the simple “sports” term replaces it—sports become gendered and society predominantly resorts to use the term “women’s sports” when talking about women playing sports or when talking about sports that are done by women. This happens regardless of the sport in question and irrespective of whether the sport is played by both or by just one of the genders. As one of the most accessible examples, every four years, male footballers from across the world participate in a “World Cup;” while female footballers compete in the “Women’s World Cup.”

This gendering and gender marking highlights the notion that there is difference between the sporting activity of women and men, as well as that there is a difference between the processes related to sports. This gender-based distinction can also be found in visual representation and verbal sports commentary (Tanner 17). Furthermore, the existence of this gender marking gives way to the demotion of female athletes and women in sports in general—they become a marginalized “other,” involuntarily positioned against men.

Moreover, this raises the question of what makes a sport a “women’s sport,”¹ if there is such a thing. When women’s and girls’ participation in sports started, they played sports that

¹ The term “women’s sports” in this thesis paper will refer to any kind of sport played by girls and women, for simplification, unless stated otherwise.

were traditionally deemed more feminine and socially acceptable for their gender. These classically more accepted sports included gymnastics, swimming, diving, golf, and tennis—with golf and tennis being the first sports women could compete in at the quadrennial modern Olympic Games (for the first time in 1900).

However, sports indeed have been a male domain for centuries. The just previously mentioned 1900 Summer Olympics were not the first modern Olympics—the first, however, excluded women. Even decades later, the inclusion of women in certain sports proved to be controversial. For example, when women were allowed to compete in the 800 meters run at the 1928 Summer Games, the less-than-a-kilometer length was considered to be “an exceedingly long way for women to run” (Choi 13) and this particular event was removed from the Games until 1960. Anecdotes aside, women have been institutionally underrepresented in the world of sports.

The overwhelming male domination of sports has been long connected to the biological differences of men and women. The male physique, especially in sports, represents a “symbolic domination,” which then reinforces stereotypical gender roles. Female physical strength and athleticism are not a part of the stereotypical feminine woman’s characteristics—those features tend to center around domesticity, conventional beauty, and women’s biological “function” as mothers (Cavender 5). Male domination suggest power and control over women—at least to a certain extent. Athletic women, however, are in control of their own bodies and their actual physical strength.

While women have been playing most kinds of sports for a long time, their access to sports cannot exactly be compared to their male counterparts’—neither in the United States, nor worldwide.

4. Title IX and Women's Sports

4.1. Title IX

For most, familiarity with and access to playing (organized) sports starts in an educational setting (e.g. in kindergartens, pre-schools, or elementary schools). Schools emphasize sports for personal and social benefits; however, the availability of sports has not been the same for female and male students (Eitzen 8). Furthermore, there is no clear—scientific or statistical—evidence that girls are characteristically less interested in sports than their male peers. The higher participation number of boys until the early 1970s reflected more of the opportunities they were offered and not in any way the girls' lack of interest (O'Reilly and Cahn 332).

The Civil Rights Act of 1964 included prohibition of gender discrimination in the area of employment—however, not in the area of public, federally funded education programs (which include athletic programs) (“Civil Rights Act of 1964”). It is important to note, however, that laws regarding employment-related gender discrimination are significant in professional sports (e.g. in settings where sports are not performed in a school environment and the athletes are paid for their performance and achievements).

The first effective legal step in providing equality for all genders in sports came as a portion of an education act in the 1970: Title IX is a section of the United States Education Amendments of 1972 (more specifically, Public Law No. 92- 318, 86 Stat. 235., codified as 20 U.S.C. §§ 1681–1688). It was introduced and co-written by former Indiana Senator Birch Bayh. In 2002, the act was renamed to Patsy Mink Equal Opportunity in Education Act, in honor of its late co-author, Congresswoman Patsy Mink.

The act expresses, that

[n]o 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.

(“Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972”)

In its essence, Title IX requires gender impartiality for male and female students in educational programs that receive federal funding. These educational programs do not only include sports, per se; however, athletics is one of the key areas addressed in the law. Before Title IX, girls and young women were excluded from taking advantage of most of the athletic programs in schools—thus, Title IX provided a paradigm shift (O’Reilly and Cahn 338).

In the year before Title IX was introduced, in 1971, less than 295,000 female students took part in high school sports, making up only seven per cent of all high school athletes. In the same year, the number of female college athletes was less than 30,000; which number revealed the lack of institutional commitment: colleges spent only two per cent of their annual athletic budget on female athletes and athletic scholarships for women were practically unavailable (O’Reilly and Cahn 338). This was the playing field that Title IX set out to change in 1972.

Nevertheless, not long after Title IX was introduced, the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), as well as high school administrators protested that boys’ and men’s sports would be affected negatively if girls’ and women’s sports had to be funded equally. However, cutting boy’s or men’s sports from athletic programs has never been the intent of the law—as Title IX is about bringing the treatment and representation of the underprivileged gender (whichever gender it may be) to the level of the other, more privileged gender (O’Reilly and Cahn 332).

The actual regulations about the ways of implementing the law did not go into effect until 1975 (“Title 34 Education”). This gave the institutions about three years to familiarize themselves with the law and to mold their athletic programs in accordance with the regulations. However, even in 1975, the Office for Civil Rights (OCR) did not actually enforce the law (“Gender Equity...”). Furthermore, according to the National Women’s Law Center, while there is no such gap that would actually constitute a Title IX violation, gaps of 10 percentage points or more usually indicate that schools are not conforming to the law (“State Ranking...”).

1). Title IX does not require institutions to meet any certain quotas. Schools and other establishments have three separate options to meet the standard of Title IX—they only need to abide by one of these options.

The first route to implement Title IX is to “compare the ratio of male and female athletes to male and female students;” after which, if the numbers are close to each other, the particular school is probably conforming to the rules. The second option is to prove and demonstrate that the school in question has been actively doing their best in expanding the availability of sports for the underrepresented (usually female) gender. The third option is to exhibit that the school has already “effectively accommodated the interests and abilities of the underrepresented gender” (O’Reilly and Cahn 332). This three-part test is flexible, as it allows schools to comply even if the actual percentages of spots on teams allocated to males and females are not substantially proportionate with the percentages of male and female students enrolled.

4.2. Women's Sports since the 1970s

Beginning in the 1970s, many “firsts” took place in American women’s sports—however, the events of the first couple of decades had not yet reflected the results of Title IX (as it was simply too early to achieve anything substantial). Nonetheless, such events also further progressed women’s sports. In 1972, women were finally allowed to compete in the Boston Marathon. In 1973, the United States Tennis Association announced that men and women would receive equal prize money at its U.S. Open tournaments—to this day, this equal payment is a rarity among sports tournaments. In the same year, tennis champions Billie Jean King and Bobby Riggs took part in a “battle of the sexes” match—King won, in front of a television audience of fifty million. In 1978, in a lawsuit filed by Melissa Ludtke—a *Sports Illustrated* reporter—a United States District Court judge ruled that female and male reporters should have the same access to athletes. The predecessor of the Women’s National Basketball Association (WNBA) was formed in 1978 (but only lasted until 1981). Congress also passed the Amateur Sports Act of 1978, which prohibits gender-based discrimination in amateur sports (O’Reilly and Cahn 28).

In 1984, a considerable blow was dealt to Title IX in the form of the Grove City College v. Bell lawsuit. The ruling effectively expressed that Title IX did not cover entire educational institutions—only those programs that were directly receiving federal funds. Non-federally funded subunits of educational institutions, such as college departments of physical education and athletics were denied the application of Title IX. In 1986, the first American woman (and first African American person), Anita DeFrantz was appointed to the International Olympic Committee. In 1987, 33 years after the magazine’s first issue, track and field athlete Jackie Joyner-Kersey became the first woman on the cover of *Sports Illustrated* (O’Reilly and Cahn 29).

In 1988, Congress passed the Civil Rights Restoration Act over President Ronald Reagan's veto. This act essentially invalidated the effects of the 1984 Grove City ruling, by prohibiting sex-based discrimination throughout entire educational institutions if any one part of the institution received federal funding. In addition to the Civil Rights Restoration Act, the Office for Civil Rights (OCR) publicly renewed its commitment to ending gender discrimination—it declared Title IX a top priority and published the so-called “Title IX Athletic Investigator's Manual” to strengthen the law's enforcement. In 1991, the United States Women's National Soccer Team won the first-ever FIFA Women's World Cup championship; while the United States Women's Rugby Team also won the first-ever Women's Rugby World Cup competition (O'Reilly and Cahn 29).

In February of 1992, in the case of *Franklin v. Gwinnett County Public Schools*, the Supreme Court ruled that the victims of gender-based discrimination may be awarded monetary damages in sex discrimination cases. This case and ruling was crucial in making Title IX more effective, as it allowed women to find lawyers who now might be willing to take their cases because of the possibility of damages awarded; while it also threatened colleges. This threat of possible future Title IX-related lawsuits had a greater effect once the institutions understood that they might have to pay legal fees and compensatory damages (Mitchell and Ennis 24).

In 1994, another obstacle was eliminated by an amendment to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, introduced by Senators Carol Moseley-Braun (from Illinois) and Edward “Ted” Kennedy (from Massachusetts). The amendment required colleges and universities to disclose its funding and participation rates—something that previously was not available and hindered bringing Title IX-related complaints against colleges (Dowling). In 1998, women's ice hockey was added to the Winter Olympics for the first time and the United States National Team won the first-ever gold medal in the sport. In 2000, the first professional women's soccer league, the Women's United Soccer Association (WUSA) was announced

(this league suspended operations in 2003). In the same year, Sandra Baldwin was elected as the first ever female president of the United States Olympic Committee in its 106-year history (O'Reilly and Cahn 29).

Also in 2000, American tennis champion Venus Williams signed the largest endorsement deal ever for a woman in sports, a contract worth forty million dollars over five years, with the athletic wear company Reebok. During the 2002 Winter Olympics, bobsledders Jill Bakken and Vonette Flowers became the first pair to win a gold medal in the sport—Flowers was also the first African American athlete to win gold at a Winter Olympics.

4.3. Title IX in Practice

In 1989, male high school athletes still outnumbered females—with a ratio of 3.4 million to 1.8 million. Ten years later, by 2009, the high school sports participations gap further shrank, with 4.4 million boys and 3.1 million girls playing sports. This trend was mirrored by college sports as well. Women's professional sports, including, for example, the WNBA (which started out in 1997) has further popularized sports among women (Messner and Cooky 22). However, these numbers still did not reflect the ratio of male and female students, for example.

Today, women's athletic programs still continue to fall behind men's programs. In 2013-2014, while more than half of the NCAA schools' student population was made up of women, they only received 43 per cent of the "athletic participation opportunities" ("Title IX and Men's Sport" 1). Similar disparities are found on the high school level as well, since young girls only receive 42 per cent of the school-sponsored opportunities to participate ("Title IX and Men's Sport" 1). Female athletes at a typical Division I (highest level) college receive circa 28 per cent of the total amount spent on athletics. Furthermore, 31 per cent of the total money spent on recruiting goes to women; while 42 per cent of the total money spent on scholarships

is awarded to women. This means that for every dollar spent on women's sports, roughly two and a half dollars are spent on men's sports. ("Debunking the Myths..." 2).

Despite the growing numbers, some girls and young women do not fare as well when it comes to participation—most importantly, girls of color. This is also a "perfect" example of intersectionality, the feminist sociological theory which holds that "forms of oppression interrelate, creating a system of oppression that reflects the 'intersection' of multiple forms of discrimination" (Knudsen 61). In general, schools with high concentrations of minority and low-income students have fewer resources when it comes to extracurricular activities. Not only is the availability of sports reduced, it is particularly limited for girls. Furthermore, the chances of girls of color playing sports in school rates below white girls, white boys, and boys of color ("Finishing Last" 1). Therefore, girls of color are doubly marginalized when it comes to sports participation. Heavily minority high schools have fewer athletic opportunities and even those are not distributed equally.

Until the early 21st century, there have been 190 court cases involving Title IX claims in the athletic setting (Anderson and Osborne 131). As there is currently little growth in female participation in school sports at the high school and college levels—even though the numbers are holding steady—the future trends of such legal proceedings might continue to increase. Since women's sports programs in many states are losing ground in funding, this may "trigger a renewed interest by the courts in Title IX compliance with the list of factors provided in the 1975 regulations" (Anderson and Osborne 157).

4.4. Progressing Women's Sports vs Eliminating Men's Sports

Title IX aims for a growth in female sports participation. Title IX's intention, however, has never been to eliminate men's sport, as the organizations supporting the law are not in favor of reducing boy's and men's athletic opportunities ("Dropping Men's Sports" 1). One of these main supporting nonprofit organizations is The Women's Sports Foundation (WSF). The WSF was founded in 1974, by former tennis champion Billie Jean King in order to "advance the life of girls and women through sports and physical activity" ("About Us"). The Foundation, to this day, helps to achieve gender equality in sports on all levels by providing guidelines to academic institutions and its leaders.

The WSF is also a staunch opponent of justifying discrimination with an economy-based reasoning. The foundation explains the false myths surrounding Title IX and gender equality with a possibly more relatable analogy: eliminating men's sports in favor of women's sports would be the same as if an employer reduced all of the employees' salaries, only to increase the salaries of the group that has been historically struggling with discrimination—a situation that would never occur ("Dropping Men's Sports" 2). Thus, Title IX should not be condemned and turned into a scapegoat when schools do decide to cut certain men's sports.

The goal of Title IX has always been to level the metaphorical playing field in favor of the disenfranchised group—to bring the discriminated group up to the level of its more fairly treated counterpart. This means that the aim is not to bring the number of male athletes down to the level of the female athletes who were previously not provided with opportunities to play. Such misconceptions can hurt the law's image and can further marginalize female athletes. There are indeed institutions that choose to eliminate a men's team in order to accommodate Title IX; however, these actions are counterproductive. By abandoning the previously favored teams, interest for the new—female—team cannot be raised. Such arrangements just tend to pit the two sides against each other ("Dropping Men's Sports" 3).

Empirical data also proves that the blame that Title IX receives is severely misplaced. A number of women's sports have also declined since Title IX was implemented—however, it would not be logical to say that the same law that has created growth and opportunities is also the main cause of the decline in those sports (“Title IX and Men's Sports” 2). The discrimination of one group clearly cannot be solved by switching the “recipient” of that discrimination. Therefore, the WSF and the like, are for such measures that cut unnecessary expenditures on the most expensive men's sports and use that surplus amount to create and expand opportunities for the diminished gender. They also advocate for institutionalized change, where sports conferences can adopt cost-saving measures that can help funding the previously excluded group's activities.

Title IX, however, is not just about participation rates and numbers. Research studies by the Women's Sports Foundation have shown that girls and women who play sports have better physical and emotional health (“Benefits...” 1). Notably, regular physical activity can reduce the risk of obesity for adolescent girls. Moreover, a research highlighted by the *New York Times* has shown that women who played sports while young had a 7 per cent lower risk of obesity 20 to 25 years later, when women were in their late 30s and early 40s. The study also notes that while a 7 per cent decline in obesity is relatively moderate, “no other public health program can claim similar success” (qtd, in “The Battle for Gender Equity...” 3). Furthermore, studies have also linked playing sports to reduced chances of breast cancer and osteoporosis later in life (“Physical Activity...” 7). As for psychological health, girls who play sports report better health, body image, and an overall higher quality of life, compared to girls who do not play sports. Studies even showed that the difference in self-reported life satisfaction for girls who play sports versus girls who do not is larger than the difference for boys (“The Battle for Gender Equity...” 3).

On the 40th anniversary of the implementation of Title IX, President Barack Obama penned an op-ed piece for *Newsweek*. In the article, he praised and thanked the women who kept the legislation alive, while promising to uphold and protect Title IX:

We have come so far. But there's so much farther we can go. There are always more barriers we can break and more progress we can make. As president, I'll do my part to keep Title IX strong and vibrant, and maintain our schools as doorways of opportunity so every child has a fair shot at success. (Obama)

5. American Women at the Summer Olympic Games (2012)

After the 2012 Summer Olympics, the Sport, Health and Activity Research and Policy Center for Women and Girls (SHARP) released a study that gave insight to the participation of women, as well as the representation of female leaders in Olympic organizations. The 2012 Games were widely dubbed as the “Year of the Woman,” but only in comparison with previous Olympic tournaments. The study has found that at the London Olympics, in 2012, more than half of the United States’ delegation were women. Furthermore, women made up 44.3 per cent of total number of athletes (Smith and Wrynn 5).

However, as the study cites, it is important to note that male athletes still have more opportunities in individual sports, which still causes an imbalance in the Games. This means, for example, that in 2012, the women’s number could surpass the men’s in part because the women’s soccer and field hockey teams managed to qualify for the Olympics, while their respective men’s teams could not. The women’s soccer and field hockey teams alone accounted for 34 women in the United States’ overall athlete pool (Smith and Wrynn 5).

In addition to 2012 being the Year of the Woman, there has been discussion about the 2012 Games in terms of it being the so-called Title IX Olympics. American women and women’s teams won medals in sports that are now widely played by women in high schools and colleges, as a result of Title IX. These sports included basketball, soccer, gymnastics, water polo, and volleyball, among others (Smith and Wrynn 5). As today’s leading athletes all grew up in a post-Title IX world, they have had more opportunities than many of their predecessors at the Games.

The United States is also a leading nation when it comes to its Olympic organizational leadership. The International Olympic Committee has instituted that the number of female members should be at a minimum of 20 per cent of National Olympic Committees’ and similar organizations’ (National Governing Bodies and International Federations) total members.

While the 204 National Olympic Committees are still mostly governed by men—174 of them have an all-male leadership—there are countries that do reach the 20 percent threshold (Smith and Wrynn 7). The United States Olympic Committee even exceeds the rate proposed by the International Olympic Committee, as its female members make up 37.5 per cent of its total members (Lennon 185).

However, this percentage admittedly did not satisfy the US Olympic Committee itself, as its Chief Executive Officer gave the committee a “failing grade” on diversity (Gomez). In 2011, the United States Olympic Committee formed a Diversity Inclusion Working Group, with the aim of “formulating diversity strategies for the U.S. Olympic and Paralympic Family in the United States” (“Diversity Working Group Recommendations” 3). In its official recommendations, the Group cites that since the ratio of women in the American workforce, management roles, and in higher education is around—or even higher than—fifty per cent, the United States Olympic Committee and the United States Olympic and Paralympic Movements should also follow these numbers and adopt the positive changes in its organizational structure (“Diversity Working Group Recommendations” 5).

As Smith and Wrynn’s SHARP’s research points out, it cannot be overlooked that the ratio of men and women at the Olympics obviously depends on whether teams manage to qualify for the Games. In 2012, this meant that the presence of the women’s soccer and field hockey teams—but not their male counterparts’—tilted the scale in the women’s favor (40). There are also sports that previously have only had men-only competitions at the Olympics, including boxing. The 2012 London Olympics provided the first opportunities for female boxers—however, while the men’s game has ten weight classes, the women only have three.

Nevertheless, there are also a few sports that still present unmatched opportunities: Greco-Roman wrestling is only available for men, while synchronized swimming and rhythmic gymnastics are only available for women—at least on a professional competitive level at the

Olympic Games (Smith and Wrynn 40). It can be noted that these sports represent typically or stereotypically masculine (wrestling) and stereotypically feminine (synchronized swimming and rhythmic gymnastics) sports activities.

Overall, the United States did not have the highest female to male ratio in 2012, but their 50.8 per cent did rank them in the top ten among the participating countries (Smith and Wrynn 40). However, as mentioned, this number is contingent on the success of the particular teams or individual athletes. Olympic qualifications and qualifying tournaments provide the men and women equal footing; as in, in general, they all have the chance to show their skills and secure a spot in the Games. Thus, based on the example above, should the men's soccer or field hockey teams have achieved success in their respective qualifying competitions, the near fifty-fifty per cent balance would not have existed in 2012 either.

Nevertheless, American women's have been successful at the Games themselves in 2012 and years since the implementation of Title IX (with the exception of the 1980 Olympics, when the United States boycotted the Games to protest the Soviet war in Afghanistan). In 2012, thirty per cent of the American sportswomen received medals for their efforts; in comparison, 15 percent of the American sportsmen reached the medalists' podium (Tasneem, Lee, and Dusenbery). However, it is important to point out that while Title IX raised the number of female participants, it is understandably not the only factor when it comes to Olympic-level success.

6. Media Representation and Its Effects on Society

6.1. Portrayal of Female Athletes in Visual Media

The media is one among the many cultural institutions which may reproduce sexism, racism, and enforce negative stereotypes. Visual media like television programs and sports broadcasts are relatively easy access. They are everywhere, and usually, whether people want it or not, are a part of people's everyday lives. The media can also be educational and their content can affect and influence people in different ways. Even print media is still available and carries an influential effect. Furthermore, the development of technology and the widening availability of the Internet helps the spreading of online journalism and online commentary, presenting a newer stage and tool for impacting people. Therefore, the way women and female athletes are represented in these media greatly affects how society and the general public views and treats them as well. Moreover, in the case of women's sports, not only the manner, but the quantity of the representation is just as crucial.

In the case of representation, however, numbers and statistics are not the only things of importance. As mentioned, the quality of representation is also a vital and indispensable factor. Misrepresentation can be just as harmful as underrepresentation. The concept of media's influencing role is nothing new: therefore, broadcast and print media have an obvious effect on its viewers and readers (Raley and Lucas 20). Not every media outlet has to include women in their broadcast or print issues all the time; that would not be realistic either. However, the American society today is more accustomed to seeing the same sportsmen repeatedly.

Young girls and even adult women need to be able to see themselves represented and be able to identify with what they see on their television screens or on the pages of a printed newspaper or magazine. The media needs to acknowledge that female athletes count more than just being portrayed with worn out stereotypes, the opportunity to create more scandalous storylines, or just being presented in a half-hearted manner. Just like every other group that has

had problems with representation (women, racial and ethnic minorities, the LGBT* community), the ever-growing group of female athletes need the media to be respectful. Representation matters: young females are in need of positive role models, while everyone else needs to be familiarized with today's real society and not be influenced by stereotypical portrayals (or the lack of any portrayal).

Sport itself is related and rooted in group identity, “whether gender or national or regional identity, and with wider matters of power in society” (Matheson 138). Sport can be studied as a “cultural theatre where the values of the larger society are resonated, dominant social practices are legitimized, and structural inequalities reproduced” (qtd. in Matheson 139). Sports and sports events are in a well-known interdependent relationship with the media; the media needs sports to get their desired ratings, while sports need the media to gain and raise awareness. Sports commentary is—for the most time—unscripted and produced live on the spot; meaning, that it involves less self-monitoring and more honest or even careless material (Matheson 139). Therefore, it can convey and mediate existing social constructs and paint an unfiltered picture of public opinion.

Research has shown that most times the way women are represented in visual media or by the press, is still rooted in the “ideological interest of male hegemony” (Ponterotto 94). It is generally agreed upon that women are underrepresented in the media. This underrepresentation is a way of social marginalization which causes them to be systematically excluded from opportunities and resources that are usually available to men (Ponterotto 94).

As per two consecutive studies done by Messner and Cooky over two decades, even though the number of women participating sports has grown, the gap between their respective visual media representations has actually widened (22). In 1990, five per cent of television news coverage was spent on women's sports and female athletes. At that time, the researches were optimistic, hoping for a gradually growing number in the coming years. The assumption

was that television coverage was just still “lagging behind the surging popularity of women’s sports” (Messner and Cooky 22). However, close to twenty years later, in their latest study, the above predictions and hopes proved to be erroneous. In 2009, women’s sports received 1.6 per cent of the overall television news coverage—as for a sports-specific channel, they only received 1.4 per cent of the coverage of ESPN’s most watched SportsCenter program (Messner and Cooky 22).

The above research shows that, regardless of the ways women have progressed in the previous decades, this marginalization in the media has increased over time. The quantity and the quality of the media coverage further exemplifies how the news media and sports media are continually building audiences for men’s sports, while shutting out and silencing the women (Ponterotto 95). The fact that there is a lack of coverage, even with the steadily growing number of women participating in high school, collegiate, and even professional sports, the media is—either consciously or unconsciously—sending out a message about how sports are still “by, for, and about men” (Ponterotto 95).

It is also important to mention that female athletes seemingly only achieve visibility when they are marketed as erotic, sexual objects (Ponterotto 96). Once again, despite the developments in the sexual liberation and freedom of women, the old-age stereotypes are still assigned to the gender; regardless of how professional or successful the women in question are. More often than not, what the media delivers to its viewers (and readers or even listeners) is that women should all be attractive, desirable, and readily available objects for the enjoyment of men. One of the main evidences to this is how much emphasis today’s media outlets put on the appearance of female athletes and how much more attention those women get whose looks fit into the more stereotypically feminine category.

This mentality takes away from the most important aspect of professional sports: the fact that sports are about skills, talent, hard work, and perseverance. Sports is a field where

participants, if judged, should be judged based on their capability, experience, and competitive success and not the way they look or the exterior they present themselves with. However, by looking at mainstream media coverage, female sexual desirability and conventional, stereotypical beauty still takes the spotlight away from those athletes whose main interest does not lie in their looks—but their actual skills (Ponterotto 96). Based on this mentality, a more stereotypically feminine, but less successful gymnast can more valuable for the media—and through the media, for its audience—than, let's say, a heavier, more stereotypically masculine, but also more successful, female weightlifter.

Sports commentary also often puts attractiveness above athletic abilities: they tend to highlight and explicitly mention women's body shape and body parts. Furthermore, they also pay more attention to women's sports attires—both during and outside sports events (Ponterotto 98). Likewise, when women are portrayed in non-athletic settings, their passivity and sexual desirability is again emphasized. As a recent example, in May 2015, professional golfer Lexi Thompson appeared on the cover of *Golf Digest Magazine*—a well-established American monthly magazine about the sport of golf. In 2011, Thompson was the youngest player ever to win an LPGA (Ladies Professional Golf Association) tournament; she has been a successful player ever since. On the cover of the magazine, Thompson appeared nearly half-naked, with only a towel covering her breast. Visually, nothing truly suggested that she is an accomplished golfer—except for the golf glove she was wearing. It is also important to note, that previous and subsequent covers of the same magazine dominantly featured fully clothed men; for example, conventionally average-looking men in golf attire, pictured playing golf.

Such moves by publications seem not only desperate, but also rather sexist. Covers where professional sportswomen are pictured wearing close to no clothes only reinforce all the obstacles female athletes have been facing in a predominantly still male oriented industry. Sociologists John Harris and Ben Clayton point out that “such emphasis of sexuality, through

eroticism, implies a masculine ideal of the role of women in sports, and simultaneously trivializes the athletic capabilities of the female body” (qtd. in Ponterotto 98). If professional female athletes are reduced only to their looks and their outward experience, the unknowing audience member (e.g. someone who picks up the magazine) who sees them for the first time on a similar cover image, will not be able to grasp the women’s abilities or determination.

Similarly, those women who lack the necessary “aptitudes” to become stereotypical objects of desire, are significantly underrepresented and even misrepresented. Sportswomen who do not confine to the male desire and the stereotypically feminine image are often openly mocked as “mannish, labeled as gay, or represented as social misfits” (Ponterotto 98). It is important to point out that based on these two contradictory attitudes and points of view, both stereotypically feminine and unfeminine women are reduced to their looks and their sports-related skills are overshadowed by such representations.

It has been suggested that such attitudes can be explained by a male-led society’s need to reaffirm a hegemonic masculinity (Ponterotto 106). By overlooking women’s abilities, the media enforces a certain hegemonic femininity which in turn enforces and legitimizes the stereotypical—and rather outdated—concept of dominant men and subordinate women. This over-utilized image of women trivialize female athletes’ accomplishments and reinforces the earlier mentioned concept of “women’s sports” being an excluded “other” that needs to be separated and isolated from “real” sports—sports done by men.

The visibility of women with considerable muscle mass, visible muscle definition, or women exhibiting speed and exceptional dexterity is more consistent with traditional masculinity (Haywood and Dworkin 148). Therefore, through different channels—including the media—more emphasis is put on these women’s beauty or even their “heterosexual desirability” (Cavender 6). As such, female athletes might even feel a need to assert their femininity by publicizing their—mainly heterosexual—relationships and family affairs.

Furthermore, the Women's Sports Foundation (WSF) claims that the "image problem" that the display of feminine athletes sets out to solve is just a code term for homophobia ("Media—Images and Words..." 10). Stereotypically feminine portrayals only cater to a heteronormative ideology; even though the media's role should be to report on sports events and not necessarily the athletes' sexuality (unless, of course, they actually wish to discuss it). This hypersexualization and homophobia have a big role in the marketing of female athletes. According to Pat Griffin—who is the founding director of Changing the Game, an advocacy program focused on addressing LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender) issues in school-based athletic programs—women are "more vulnerable to the lesbian label being used as a way to limit participation and disparage women's sports in general" (qtd. Cunningham et al. 53).

As mentioned earlier, traditionally, women are supposed to be stereotypically feminine, graceful, weak, and less athletic. When these characteristics are not met and a woman is portrayed as athletically superior and as someone who is not willing to conform to the more feminine archetype, she is more typically labeled as "unnatural," and often enough, as a lesbian—regardless of her actual sexual orientation (Cunningham et al. 53). Furthermore, this lesbian label can still be used a political weapon that can be used against women who wish to challenge sexism (Griffin 259). While today's society is increasingly accepting towards the gay community, such labels—especially when used in a negative manner—can bring about damaging consequences. Naturally, there are indeed "out" lesbian and bisexual women in professional sports; however, even in their case, their sexual orientation should not be treated as their most talked about quality.

All of this is not to say that women face these same issues in every single professional setting—on the contrary, the world of sports seem to be more conservative than other areas in the United States. As social psychologists Amanda Roth and Susan Basow point out, the

society of the United States “continues to accept myths regarding the supposed weakness of women’s bodies” (qtd. in Ponterotto 106). No matter at what rate the number of female athletes increase, their physical powers are still undermined. Moreover, this marginalizing can have serious—negative—consequences, as women are often not presented with images that would increase their self-confidence, inspire them to take up professional sports, or make them enjoy leaving the boundaries of stereotypical femininity.

In order for these ideals to be changed, age-old social conditioning and social constructs would have to be overturned or at least modernized. As long as the majority of the mainstream media aides and encourages these constructs, it is hard to overcome the general biases and prejudices. It is undoubtedly difficult to surmount these obstacles if there is no public awareness of the issue. The responsibility of the media has also been pointed out by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), stating that the media has to accept the idea of quality women’s sports and has to invest in propagating more—positive—information about female athletes and the work they do (Ponterotto 108).

6.2. Language in Representation

As a continuation, the language used describing athletes of both genders is also an important factor to examine. As research has found, the language used to portray male athletes is more likely to refer to physical aggression, violence, control, and force. This language, for example, can include military or war metaphors—fields that also still tend to be dominated by men. In contrast, the language used to describe female athletes would reference appearance, uncontrolled emotions, sentiments, and relationships. Furthermore, men are almost never defined by such feminine language (Cavender 24).

Overall, traditionally masculine and feminine mannerisms would be used to portray the respective genders—always creating a distinction between the two (Cavender 8). The language used for men's sports is a more active one (hence the combat metaphors and the references to control). On the other hand, women are put into a more passive role by the language traditionally utilized to describe them. For example, this is just how discussions of appearance are more prevalent in discussions about female athletes.

There is also a significant infantilization of adult female athletes in the language used in American media: research has found that women are often described as “girls” and “young ladies,” while men were hardly ever described as “boys” (Tanner 10). By describing adult women as “girls,” they are immediately given a subordinate status. Physical strength and weakness, as well as success and failure are also represented differently in the case of sportsmen and sportswomen. Female athletes receive more ambivalent descriptions, but not the men—further maintaining the idea of women being less skilled and powerful (Tanner 10). When men lose, it is because their (male) opponents were strong and powerful. When women lose in sports, it is usually blamed on their own lack of self-confidence or nervousness (Tanner 11).

Using language that draws attention to the women's body is also an everyday occurrence. It is an ancient truth that sex sells—sport also takes its own share of this. Messner and Cooky also found that even in-depth stories about female athletes have been laced with sexualized language and sexist humor; however, this practice seems to be fading since the early 21st century (17). Still, this does not mean that sexualization and objectification are not grand issues in the language of sports; not to mention that the sexualized language turns sportswomen into objects before it even considers them to be athletes. Just because “sex sells,” it should not be tolerated if its outcome is a further perpetuated stereotype (“Media—Images and Words...” 10). Another way of “maintaining” female players’ femininity is using maternal references in sport commentary and by talking about their nurturing aptitude and capabilities (Tanner 16).

Traditional femininity does not only reflect on what it is like being a woman; it also reflects on what it means to be traditionally masculine. By showing what women are not, we get a picture of what men are—however, the visual of a physically strong, muscular woman does not fit into this traditional model. Since, from the moment when muscularity “has the possibility of being equated with femininity and of becoming an expression of female subjectivity,” the relations between the traditional masculine men and muscularity is brought into question (Hancock et al. 60). Therefore, it is suggested that as soon as a traditionally masculine feature is “added” to a woman, the masculine ego’s alleged superiority can waver.

Furthermore, even though discussion does exist about the growing number of female participations, women are still described by using the male-dominated framework pointed out earlier (Cavender 18). It is essential to call attention to the fact that it is one thing to talk and write about a certain issue or group (in this case, female athletes), but how that discussion is presented matters more. The media not only reflects on the society and culture they report on, it also has role in rethinking and redefining cultural and societal constructions. Thus, the framework and the language that each medium uses, are also created by them. As soon as the

media is faced with a new experience—in this case, the growing number of professional female athletes—it changes its existing frames, or even creates new ones (Cavender 19). However, the length of this process might not be in sync with the phenomenon itself.

The fact that there is talk about the increasing inclusion of women can also marginalizes them—it again turns them into an “other,” who are trying to break into the world of male participation. This meta-discourse about equality still somehow preserves the male hegemony. However, this seems to be a “necessary bad,” since the process of overall inclusion and representative equality has to start somewhere. As long as television news and highlights shows remain two of the most important sources of sport-related information, their participation is needed to make a change (Tanner 42).

6.3. Experience-based Guidelines

The Women’s Sports Foundation (WSF) has been issuing guidelines regarding the preferred language and visual representation for female athletes—in order to ensure a more rapid inclusion. Similar publications are trying to establish that the media reporting is authentic, realistic, and in no way derogatory (towards either of the genders). These guidelines are not enforced in any way; however, they are available to anyone who wishes to make a change. Foundations like the WSF also try to educate the athletes themselves about their rights when it comes to media participation (“Media—Images and Words...” 1).

As for visual representation, as mentioned before, the main issues are the displaying of unrealistic body types, as well as the images that rely too heavily on sexual connotations. It is also common to use models to portray female athletes in print or electronic publications—women without muscles or any visible sports skills, for example. However, both athlete and non-athlete models are frequently portrayed in static, passive and non-athletic poses or in a sexually provocative manner (“Media—Images and Words...” 2).

According to the WSF, women are more likely to be shown as failing at a sport (for example, missing a shot or dropping a ball) (“Media—Images and Words...” 2). Women however, should be portrayed realistically, as coordinated and good at their chosen discipline. If the publication talks about women as athletes, the participants’ clothing and equipment should also look authentic; as well as appropriate.

Women should also not be reduced to “headless figures,” or only their feminine features. Moreover, their poses should not look unrealistic or unnecessarily seductive either. An effective method of keeping such aspects in check is to envision how a male athlete would look in the same pose—this way, negative double standards might be circumvented (“Media—Images and Words...” 3). Additionally, the same way that women should not be infantilized (neither visually, nor verbally), young girls—children—should not be put in adult roles either. Again, the emphasis is on credibility and realistic portrayals.

Similar guidelines apply to verbal and written representation—television, radio, newspapers and the like. Since professional female athletes are just as skilled, dedicated, and courageous as their male colleagues, the use of the (American) English language should also echo this sentiment. This fundamental equality of the genders should be reflected both on and off the playing field. It is also important to make sure that women are not infantilized by being called “girls” or “ladies.” Furthermore, commentary should not differentiate between men and women by calling one gender—men—by their last names and using only the first names of the other (“Media—Images and Words...” 5).

These are of course only exemplary suggestions—the bottom line is, women deserve to be represented in a balanced and realistic manner. Women and young girls “from all ages, races, and social class backgrounds are breaking down historical barriers to their participation” (“Media—Images and Words...” 11). This is the reality that should be reflected and

perpetuated in the media in order for women to be able to receive the same admiration and respect that only sportsmen have been able to enjoy for decades.

7. The United States Women's National Soccer Team

7.1. The USWNT's First 30 Years

Title IX has brought obvious changes to the world of women's athletics; even if its main goal, reasonable equality, still has not been met just yet. In order to present an actual example of how female athletes are being treated and how their representation affects their job, this thesis paper would like to use the United States Women's National Soccer Team (also known as the USWNT) for demonstration.

The United States Women's National Soccer Team played its first ever match in 1985 (and lost). As the date shows, the team's foundation happened only after the implementation of Title IX, which means that the players on the first national team roster grew up in an era when sports were finally just as available to girls and boys—at least in theory. Nevertheless, to this day, the treatment of the Women's National Team and the United States Men's National Soccer Team (USMNT) is unbalanced and unequal; regardless of their actual respective achievements.

Six years after its first game, the USWNT won the first ever FIFA Women's World Cup. However, the team's most iconic victory happened eight years later, at the 1999 Women's World Cup. The first time the United States hosted the Women's World Cup in 1999, fans of the team and the game broke the attendance records for a women's sports event. The final between the United States and China brought a crowd of 90,185 to the Rose Bowl in California—the largest crowd ever to witness a women's athletic event on American soil (“The Battle for Gender Equity...” 3). The USWNT won in a penalty shoot-out, cementing the team's legacy.

That victorious team has achieved a legendary status in the world of women's soccer and to this day, the players are still referred to as "the '99ers." However, regardless of their success, they could not escape the media's objectification. At the final of the 1999 World Cup, after scoring the fifth penalty kick in the penalty shootout—and essentially winning the match for the United States—player Brandi Chastain dropped to her knees and in the heat of the moment, took off her shirt. After the team's victory, this single event and the black Nike sports bra that Chastain wore under her jersey garnered more media attention than the whole World Cup tournament.

Male soccer players constantly remove their shirts during games, as it is a well-known—usually—celebratory "ritual" and not one male player would be singled out for it. In the case of Brandi Chastain, all of the focus was steered in her direction. The celebratory motion was later even dubbed as "striptease," creating a severely sexualized atmosphere around the story (Tanner 14). Thus, the image that the media conveyed and promoted through this event was of someone whose actual job is to remove her clothes (a stripper), and not of a professional world champion athlete. Even years later, for example when Chastain took part in a golf tournament commentators kept bringing up the story, saying that she "managed to keep her shirt on" (Tanner 15).

In the next two Women's World Cups—in 2003 and 2007—the team could "only" get the third-place bronze medal. However, in 2011, the team took (almost) center stage once again, with a new generation of players—only one member of the '99ers was part of the 2011 roster, the rest of the team retired in the previous years. In the tournament's quarterfinal the team performed its then second most unforgettable victory. At the same World Cup, the final between the United States and Japan—which was held exactly on the twelfth anniversary of the 1999 final—also broke the Twitter world record of the time in number of tweets per second:

7,196.34 (“The Battle for Gender Equity...” 3). Even though the team did not get gold medal, the tournament still produced some of the most memorable moments of the team.

In 2013, the team’s leading forward, Abby Wambach, broke the record of the most international goals scored by an individual player by scoring her 159th career goal. It is important to note that the previous record holder was also a female player, forward Mia Hamm who was a member of the legendary ‘99ers team. Both Hamm and Wambach have been recipients of the FIFA World Player of the Year awards—with Mia Hamm being the first American to ever win it. To this day, Abby Wambach holds the record for international goals among both women and men—however, she has retired in December 2015, so the record set by her (184) can be surpassed in the future. Interestingly enough, the next in line is also a female player—Canada’s Christine Sinclair (with 161 goals).

While Abby Wambach is undoubtedly the most successful player to ever be on the USWNT, her representation and treatment have not always reflected this. During and after the 2011 World Cup, even though she was the biggest American star of the tournament, her teammate, goalkeeper Hope Solo received far more media attention and endorsements (Cunningham et al. 53). The reason for this lies in the earlier mentioned “image problem” of female athletes. Wambach has been a well-liked and attractive woman; however, she has never conformed to stereotypically feminine qualities: she has been wearing her hair short, has been dressing in a more androgynous style, she is tall, and she has always had a “bigger,” more muscular build. She is also a lesbian—although, she was not exactly open about her sexuality during the 2011 tournament. On the other hand, Hope Solo conveyed a stereotypically appealing look: long hair, more feminine style, and a heterosexual relationship. This observation does not mean to take away from Solo’s actual skills (she is one of the most successful goalkeepers in the world); however, the two women were not given equal chances due to society’s needs of receiving “non-threatening” visuals.

In 2015, the United States team defeated Japan 5-2 to win the 2015 FIFA Women's World Cup, becoming the first ever women's team to win three World Cups. The final match took the record as the most-watched soccer game—men's or women's—in the history of the United States (“The Battle for Gender Equity...” 3). Furthermore, in-between the World Cups, the USWNT has won four gold and one silver Olympic medals. According to the data available, women's professional soccer in the United States continues to grow in popularity as well—at least partially due to the national team's popularity and success. Women's soccer teams have increased from 318 NCAA teams in 1991 to 1022 teams in 2014 (“The Battle for Gender Equity...” 3).

7.2. Wage Discrepancies and Current Developments

Currently, the United States Women's National Soccer Team is number one (1) in the international FIFA (Fédération Internationale de Football Association) rankings, which are regularly updated based on the tournaments and games played between the world's nations. As mentioned before, the women's team has won four Olympic tournaments and three World Cups to this day. The men's team, however, has never been able to reach any of these (or similar) successes in their respective competitions—as well as, at times, they have failed to even qualify for either big (Olympic or World Cup) tournament. As per the official FIFA rankings, the men's team is currently holding the 29th position among the world's soccer-playing nations (“Men's Ranking”). In general, such disparity should not be cause for any concern. However, when closely examined, it is clear that the treatment of the two teams are not paralleled by their respective achievements.

The Chicago-based United States Soccer Federation (USSF) has been advertising the two teams with a joint slogan, “One Nation One Team” (abbreviated as 1N1T). This motto suggests that the two teams are “cut from the same cloth,” are equally respected, and treated

the same way. The saying, in theory, portrays the two teams as equals, as one and the same. On the one hand, it is slightly misleading to equate the more successful women's team with the men's team. On the other hand, appropriating the women's team success is not necessarily the most unfortunate part of the two team's relationship. Current events have uncovered that there are bigger differences between the teams than the number of their medals.

In February 2016, news surfaced that the United States Soccer Federation decided to sue the players' association that represent the women's national team (Das B14). This happened only shortly after the team boycotted a game during their World Cup Victory Tour in Honolulu, citing unsafe field conditions—the first sign of a bigger issue between team and organization. In the lawsuit, U.S. Soccer was seeking to obtain a court rule about the validity of a collective bargaining agreement (CBA). A collective bargaining agreement is essentially a negotiated agreement that sets the duties of both the employer (in this case, USSF) and the employees (the USWNT). The last CBA that the team's representatives signed expired in 2012 (it was signed in 2006); since then the two parties have been “operating under a memorandum of understanding” (Das B14). In December 2015, the players' union gave the USSF 60 days to draw up a new, updated agreement—otherwise, technically, players could go on strike. This dispute has not been solved yet.

In the spring of 2016, the United States Women's National Team decided to take matters into their own hands, by filing a federal complaint with the federal Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC). In the complaint, the women's team accuses the USSF of severe wage discrimination and financial disparity between the women's and men's teams (Das A1). The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission is a federal agency that enforces civil rights laws against workplace discrimination—if it determines that the soccer federation indeed discriminated against the women by paying them less, the commission could even oversee employer compliance.

The USWNT's complaint also lists the discrepancies between the two teams' paychecks. Both the USWNT and the USMNT are required to play twenty friendly or exhibition games every year. Regardless of the same number of games, the payment structures differ. The women's team receives a base salary of 72,000 dollars to play twenty (20) games. For each match they win, they receive an additional bonus, 1,350 dollars per game—they do not receive any additional compensation for losses or ties. Therefore, if the women's team loses each of the twenty games, their salary is 72,000 dollars (3,600 dollars per game); if they win all twenty games, they earn 99,000 dollars (4,950 dollars per game).

In comparison, the men's team earns a minimum of 5,000 dollars per game, regardless of the outcome. Therefore, if the men's team loses all twenty games, their yearly salary is 100,000 dollars—this amount is 27,000 dollars more than the USWNT's "twenty losses" option and 1,000 dollars more than their "twenty wins" option. If the USMNT wins all twenty games, their yearly salary can be as high as 263,320 dollars (their win-based compensation is based on their opponents' FIFA rankings). In conclusion, a U.S. Women's National Team player makes 38 to 72 per cent of a Men's National Team player's salary (Yourish, Ward, and Almkhatar).

Furthermore, the USWNT received a team bonus of two million dollars (75,000 dollars per player) for winning the World Cup in 2015; while the USMNT received a team bonus of nine million dollars, even though they could not advance beyond the round of 16 in the 2014 World Cup. If the men have won the Cup, they would have received 390,625 dollars per player—more than five times what the women got paid. Moreover, the Federation even pays women a lower per diem allowance while travelling for games; as well as they receive less for every sponsor appearance (Yourish, Ward, and Almkhatar).

It has been argued that the men's team deserves higher salaries because they draw the bigger audiences and they generate more revenue for the U.S. Soccer Federation (DAS A1).

However, the USSF's budget projections for the current fiscal year (2016) include a projected revenue of 23 million dollars for the women's team—while the men's team is projected to bring in a revenue of 17.6 million dollars (“U.S. Soccer 2016 AGM” 57). Furthermore, the revenue-based argument would only work if the men's and women's teams of the world had the same opportunities everywhere.

Not all decisions can be based on market forces; furthermore, some factors are also impossible to quantify. The lack of proper and available broadcast of matches and limited visibility are all factors that can play into the revenue acquisition—for example, many of the USWNT's game are only available on secondary cable networks with limited access, or matches are only streamed online on the cable networks' website (sometimes for an additional fee). As factors that determine revenues are still not on an equal level, the revenue-based arguments show their flawed logic.

The men's team has enjoyed decades of support and promotion, due to the simple fact that they played their first official international match a hundred years ago, in 1916. After decades of attention and money invested in generations of male players, the women started off with a handicap of 69 years when their team was established in 1985. Furthermore, it is also not possible to retroactively calculate how much revenue the women's national team could have brought in if they had been in the center of attention all along. However, the cycle of limited visibility-low ratings-lower revenues can repeat itself without an end in sight, if no effort is put into increasing the team's visibility.

Moreover, the presentation of American women's soccer as a lossmaking entity, even though they are the top team in the world, is another sexist myth that is institutionally perpetuated via the national federations and FIFA. Sports are often encircled by and influenced by politicized context—as it was demonstrated earlier, issues regarding gender, race, and socioeconomic status are highly visible in the discussions and analyzations of sport culture.

However, when boiled down to its essentials, the players on the women's and men's team all perform the same tasks—play on a soccer field according to the internationally relegated rules of the game— and produce the same “product” with varying success.

However, this success—brought on by skills and abilities—and respect are seemingly neither correlative, nor necessarily mutually inclusive. As this thesis has established, even though they invest the same amount of time and energy into the game itself, women's sports and women's athletic performance have always been undermined and overlooked by society. The assessment of the women's “product” is heavily influenced by how society treats women in general. After the federal complaint was publicized, the president of the United States Soccer Federation, Sunil Gulati, said that the federation thinks “very highly of the women's national team” (Peterson). However, without these thoughts being put into action, the women's team cannot see the appreciation and respect it deserves.

In no average work environment does verbal or indirect praise make up for lower wages. Although sportsmen and sportswomen play for more than just the prize money and wages involved, money is an inescapable aspect of the profession. While appreciation is a motivating factor, successful women—in any profession—are not obligated to accept it as the channel of compensation. Women have been long conditioned to feel grateful for even the smallest opportunities they get—opportunities that men have been taking for granted for decades and centuries, regardless of their actual achievements. Of course it is not just the USWNT that is shortchanged by the federation that oversees its operation. However, the issues surrounding the team present some of the most apparent examples.

Based on ticket-sales figures, the general interest towards the U.S. Women's National Soccer Team is steady: fans bought all the tickets (more than 18 thousand) to a USA-Japan friendly "World Cup rematch" in less than a day (“WNT vs. Japan”). This shows that if those

in charge give women the time to develop their own truthful narrative, audiences will react positively.

Nevertheless, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission's decision can take even a year; which means that even the women's thought-to-be-guaranteed participation in the 2016 Summer Olympics is brought into question (even though they qualified for the tournament). So far, the Federation has not even attempted to refute the wage discrepancy. The members of the women's team are not asking for anything more than equality with the men's national team. This sentiment echoes the basic principle of Title IX—they do not wish to take anything away from the men's team. However, if a successful and relatively well-known team cannot get equal treatment without federal help, it is not difficult to imagine how much of a chance a school team or a less popular professional team has.

8. Conclusion

While there are international sports organizations that regulate and oversee the treatment of athletes worldwide, they cannot actually change the playing field on their own. Additionally, many of these international organizations have only started to enforce or help gender equality in sports (e.g. the International Olympic Committee's request to include more women). It was only a little more than ten years ago that then-FIFA president (as in, the head of the International Federation of Association Football) Sepp Blatter still advocated for women wearing tighter shorts and low-cut shirts on the field to make women's soccer more feminine and attractive (Christenson and Kelso).

Furthermore, this thesis does not mean to say that the problems demonstrated in this paper can only be found in the United States. Issues around female athletes and women in sports are apparent on all continents and in almost all countries; as well as there are countries where conditions are even worse and not even close to what the United States have achieved so far. However, the United States is a cultural influencer and one of the most dominant countries in the world. Representation matters, and with the rapid spread of social media and modern technology, probably more than ever.

In a speech held in February 2016, UN Assistant Secretary-General and UN Women Deputy Director Lakshmi Puri stated that sport has the potential to empower women and girls all around the world. However, even she could not ignore the conspicuous inequality between the treatment of female and male athletes: vast pay gaps are still predominant, as for example the 2013 FIFA World Cup's total payout (576 million dollars) was almost forty times more than the Women's World Cup's payout (15 million dollars); violence against women are more prevalent during popular men's sporting events; and the media attention paid to women is considerably low ("Remarks by...").

In order to solve these problems, joint effort is needed, as the female athletes cannot resolve the issues surrounding them solely by themselves. The most effective thing they can do is to participate in growing numbers; however, the necessary conditions have to be created first. The lack of media representation, for example, is a choice brought on and influenced by age-old social constructs and stereotypical gender roles which all increase the number of—metaphorical—hurdles that women have been facing for decades (if not centuries). Furthermore, citing the economy to justify any kind of discrimination is not only a flawed, but an unjust practice. By providing more opportunities for women, no one wishes to directly take away the men's resources.

While it is not explicitly stated, Title IX is inherently a feminist notion. As feminism in general is about the advocacy of women's rights on the grounds of political, social, and economic equality to men, feminism in sports—or “sports feminism”—is about creating an equal playing field for the two genders and providing the same circumstances and opportunities for women and men alike. While this is easier said than done, this thesis has shown that there are possible ways to initiate change. Moreover, the example of the United States Women's National Soccer Team has shown that American female athletes have the potential to dominate the global competition. In addition, the USWNT has proven that if a successful, well-established team is continuously ignored and taken advantage of by the institution that is supposed to care for them, they will take matters into their own hands and fight for what they deserve.

2015 was also a promising year for American women in sports: the United States Women's National Soccer Team won a World Cup and shattered broadcast records; tennis player Serena Williams achieved new successes; and mixed martial artist and fighter Ronda Rousey earned sports fans' respect from all over the world with her determination; among others. Title IX is still in effect and all these successful sportswomen grew up in an era when

the law helped to ensure their opportunity to participate in sports as children and adolescents. However, just because a handful of female athletes have achieved global success—and in some cases, even celebrity status—that does not correct all the wrong, since athletes on smaller stages still suffer, partially because they do not get enough attention.

Thus, the future is still unknown—one swallow is not a summer make and one good year might not lead to constant gradual development. The upcoming 2016 Summer Olympics will again present an important milestone, where participation and success rates will surely be the focus of attention. As sociologist Mary Jo Kane, director of the Tucker Center for Research on Girls & Women in Sport, has expressed,

[r]eally significant change is never a linear progression. It is peaks and valleys.

Right now we're hitting a peak, [but] I assume there will be a valley. But that doesn't mean women's sports will go away. There is too big a critical mass now.

(Hersh)

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