

Equality Unfulfilled: How Title IX's Policy Design Undermines Change to College Sports. Cambridge Studies in Gender and Politics

By James N. Druckman, and Elizabeth A. Sharrow. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023. 246 pp., \$90 Hardback

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James Druckman and Elizabeth Sharrow examine college sports as an overlooked form of gender inequality. Title IX outlaws sex-based discrimination in educational programming but is mainly thought of as promoting equal treatment of boys' and girls' school-sponsored sports. College sports is a lens through which to study prominent topics in the gender, race, and ethnicity politics literature. These include marginalization, the relationship between descriptive and substantive representation, and how institutions create structural inequality.

Despite the gains Title IX has made in promoting girls' participation in sports, the college sports system is hardly equal and continues to favor male sports. In large part due to institutionalized gender inequality, men's sports surpass women's in participation, funding, recruitment, and scholarships. Using college sports as a case study into everyday inequality prompts the reader to question a part of American life that is so ubiquitous that we, in the fervor of college football season and March Madness, forget that these are inherently gendered systems.

In Chapter 1, the authors point to four mechanisms upholding a system where "men's sports are the 'real' college sports whereas women's competition is merely a sideshow" (p. 13). These are (1) sex-segregated sports systems, (2) an administrative and coaching environment that preserves the current system, (3) sex-segregated pre-college sports influencing boys to value their sports over girls', and (4) economic pressures from fans of male-dominated revenue-producing sports, such as football and men's basketball. To combat these barriers, the authors propose a series of policy recommendations that include increased Title IX enforcement, more co-ed sports teams, and increased hiring of female coaches.

Given the shortfalls of Title IX and the seemingly straightforward policy solutions, why is there a lack of public and institutional support for increased gender equality in sports? To answer this question, the authors conducted an original survey of 7,500 respondents belonging to one of three categories of stakeholders: Varsity student-athletes, coaches and administrative staff, and fans and the public. These groups can either promote or hinder gender equality through bottom-up, top-down, and outside pressure, respectively. Chapter 2 outlines the authors' survey methods. Specifically, each group was asked to make hypothetical policy trade-offs

This paper has been updated since publication. A Correction Notice has been issue detailing the change.

to either promote gender inequality or maintain the status quo. Chapters 3 through 5 analyze the results for student-athletes, coaches and administrators, and fans and the public, respectively.

In Chapter 3, Druckman and Sharrow argue that student-athletes present an opportunity for bottom-up change for improved gender equality. Unfortunately, male athletes are unwilling to favor policies assisting female athletes for fear of losing their own benefits as a privileged group. However, survey results support the hopeful hypothesis that increased male student-athlete contact with female student-athletes increases support for gender parity.

Chapter 4 turns to coaches and administrative staff as an avenue for top-down reform. Men continue to hold more roles as coaches and administrators, even for women's teams. The authors argue that descriptive representation by female coaches, administrators, and NCAA officials may lead to better substantive representation for female student-athletes at achieving parity. However, the descriptive to substantive representation connection is imperfect because female coaches and administrators also prop up unequal policies. One reason is that female administrators are operating within a male-dominated institutional culture focused on winning at all costs and avoiding Title IX lawsuits in the process—not comprehensive reform.

Chapter 5 moves outside the university setting to survey fans and the public about their views of college sports. Given the relationship between gender and revenue-producing sports, the authors are specifically interested in market-driven college sports fans, meaning those who spend money on game tickets, merchandise, or donating to a sports program. The survey finds that these market-driven fans are less supportive of gender equity in college sports than the public.

Chapter 6 examines the future of Title IX, particularly given increased public attention to trans student-athletes. When does a cisgender female student-athlete's identity clash with that of a trans student who wants to compete for the college team that matches their gender identity? The authors note that this question deserves future consideration.

Apart from the inclusion of trans student-athletes, *Equality Unfulfilled* raises many topics for additional research. For one, case studies or ethnographic analysis of collegiate teams would contextualize the survey results in Chapter 4. Do female student-athletes feel their personal and athletic needs are better met by a female coach? Alternatively, does descriptive representation *not* lead to substantive representation because female coaches—given the need to be taken seriously in male-dominated profession—adopt ill-fitting training plans and coaching styles designed by male coaches for male athletes (Fleshman 2023)?

Additionally, the authors express concern that male student-athletes only spend about thirty percent of their time with female student-athletes. Do non-student-athletes, who may be involved in single-sex activities like sororities, fraternities, or acapella groups, also spend much of their time with members of their own sex? What impact do these other gendered college environments have on attitudes toward gender inequality?

Finally, the authors open Chapter 3 by asking why there isn't the same bottom-up outcry for gender parity in college sports as there were over-defunding college teams when universities faced budget cuts during the 2020 pandemic. Students and

advocates demonstrated that many of the teams facing cuts, such as men's track and field, are more racially and socio-economically diverse, versus other non-revenue-producing sports, like sailing, that are more accessible to white and wealthy students (Butler 2021). Does Title IX increase inequality for students holding many marginalized identities, like low-income female student-athletes of color?

Equality Unfulfilled's creative use of college sports as a case study of gender inequality makes the book's argument applicable to a variety of audiences, including former collegiate student-athletes like myself who rarely see our experiences reflected in academic work. *Equality Unfulfilled* is informative and approachable to a variety of readers: fans of more mainstream work from sports journalists like Lindsay Crouse; scholars interested in representation, equality, and leadership; and student-athletes, families, and coaches who want to be, raise, and hone a new generation of women leaders.

References

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doi:10.1017/rep.2023.42