

The Impact of Race on Women's Engagement in Sports: Title IX's Failure to Consider Race in
Collegiate Athletics

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Title IX allowed for positive change to occur in American collegiate athletics, but this change reveals the question, who exactly has benefited from this law? After countless studies on Title IX, it has been found that white women have experienced the most amount of glory from this law, with women of colour continuously being overlooked and not given the same amount of opportunities in collegiate athletics. Studies from the late 90s have even revealed experiences of invisibility for Black women in American college athletics, as their voices had been silenced in this space. This demonstrates Title IX as a failure for all women in college sports, as it did not consider how race would impact Black women's engagement in athletics. Therefore, the period directly after Title IX's enactment, from 1974-1999, suggests the impact of race on women's engagement in college athletics, as an intersectional lens reveals the additional societal barriers that occur for those who are Black and how they are overlooked due to only the consideration of gender for the law, thus illustrating that race should have been an aspect of Title IX.

Title IX was a law in the Educational Act of 1972 which stated, "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 educational programs or activities receiving federal financial assistance."¹ As illustrated through this quotation, Title IX did not specifically mention athletics, but it was viewed as essential for college athletics as it provided a foundation that cast a major focus on expanding the opportunities of women in school-based athletics.² During the late 60s and early 70s, in a Big Ten Conference's typical mid-western university, for every dollar spent on the women's program, thirteen hundred dollars were spent on men's athletics.³ These

¹ Susan K. Cahn, *Coming On Strong: Gender and Sexuality in Women's Sport, Second Edition* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2015), 250, https://web-p-ebscobhost-com.proxy.queensu.ca/ehost/ebookviewer/ebook/bmx1YmtfXzE0Mjg4NTdfX0FO0?sid=3bbf7443-d936-4744-a1c7-3b59c935b241@redis&vid=0&format=EB&lpid=lp_Cover-2&rid=0.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

numbers illustrate how gender greatly impacted the possibility for women to be involved and engaged in athleticism due to the lack of funds provided for them. With the enactment of Title IX, American colleges' athletics budgets would be distributed proportionally, thus creating more opportunities for women in sports, which is evident through the increase of women participating in college athletics during the law's early establishment.⁴ Between 1970 and 1990, there was a drastic increase in female participation in high education level sports, as only sixteen thousand women in America were involved in college athletics during the early 70s whereas by the late 80s, more than one hundred and sixty thousand women were involved.⁵ Even by the end of the 70s, the number of women who competed in college sports had doubled, which demonstrated the immediate impacts Title IX had on women's athletics as it offered newfound possibilities and greater access to women in sports.⁶ By 1995 it was apparent the gap in college sports between men and women was drastically closing, as not only were more women participating in higher education athletics, but more media attention began to pertain to women in sports as well.⁷ As a result, this law marked a drastic shift in the history of American collegiate sports as women's role in athletics in a higher educational setting had been minimized until the law's enactment. However, with all of the success that was occurring for white women, women of colour were overlooked due to the law solely focusing on the systematic oppression of sex in collegiate athletics. When Title IX did not state anything about race in its policies, it failed to notice the impact of race on women's engagement in sports and athleticism, which caused further unfair treatment to Black women in the athletic sphere of higher education.

⁴ Susan K. Cahn, *Coming On Strong: Gender and Sexuality in Women's Sport, Second Edition* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2015), 250, https://web-p-ebSCOhost-com.proxy.queensu.ca/ehost/ebookviewer/ebook/bmx1YmtfXzE0Mjg4NTdfX0FO0?sid=3bbf7443-d936-4744-a1c7-3b59c935b241@redis&vid=0&format=EB&lpid=lp_Cover-2&rid=0.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 259.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 254.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 278-287.

The vast differences between white and Black college athletes once Title IX was enacted are stark and appalling. There was a dramatic increase in participation opportunities that amounted to 955% for Black women.⁸ From 1971 to 2000 Black women rose from only 2,137 to 22,541 athletes in college sports.⁹ However, in comparing this statistic to the one previously stated, that by the late 80s, more than 160,000 women were involved in college athletics, it illustrates the underrepresentation of Black women in higher education sports and that they were not given as many opportunities as their white counterparts.¹⁰ Not only were Black women underrepresented in athletics directly after the implementation of Title IX, but also in the amount of scholarships awarded to female athletes when compared to their proportion in the student body of a school.¹¹ Scholarships were, and continue to be, essential for students to fund their educational journey in the United States, therefore this underrepresentation of Black women who were awarded scholarships demonstrates a significant lack of educational opportunities for African American women, especially those who suffer from low socio-economic conditions. Between 1981 and 1998, the only sports in which Black women were deemed to be overrepresented when compared with their presence in the student body of a school were track, basketball, badminton, and bowling.¹² However, indoor and outdoor track had the highest overall participation numbers in college sports, meaning there were still thousands of white participants whereas the total athletes in badminton and bowling programs represented less than 1% of

⁸ Jennifer Butler and Donna A. Lopiano, *The Women's Sports Foundation Report: Title IX and Race in Intercollegiate Sport* (New York: Women's Sport Foundation, 2003), 5, https://www.womenssportsfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/title_ix_and_race_full.pdf.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Susan K. Cahn, *Coming On Strong: Gender and Sexuality in Women's Sport, Second Edition* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2015), 259, https://web-p-ebSCOhost-com.proxy.queensu.ca/ehost/ebookviewer/ebook/bmxlYmtfXzE0Mjg4NTdfX0FO0?sid=3bbf7443-d936-4744-a1c7-3b59c935b241@redis&vid=0&format=EB&lpid=lp_Cover-2&rid=0.

¹¹ Jennifer Butler and Donna A. Lopiano, *The Women's Sports Foundation Report: Title IX and Race in Intercollegiate Sport* (New York: Women's Sport Foundation, 2003), 6, https://www.womenssportsfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/title_ix_and_race_full.pdf.

¹² Ibid., 14.

female athletes nationally, with only 170 participants.¹³ Hence, although Black women were overrepresented in these sports, these programs amounted to either the highest or lowest number of participants, which demonstrates that Black women were grouped into specific sports that generally did not offer many spots and traditionally were viewed as low in cost. These statistics illustrate the impact of race on women's engagement in sports directly after Title IX was enacted, as being an African American woman was linked to underrepresentation in college athletics. Consequently, this did not allow Black women to flourish in all programs of college athletics. This was due to the lack of scholarships awarded to them and unequal opportunities to engage in sports as well as additional barriers Black women faced, such as their socio-economic conditions, were not considered. Instead, as previously demonstrated, these women were grouped into specific athletic programs, which calls into question the effect of Title IX on concentrating African Americans into distinct regions of sport.

African American women were underrepresented in the twenty other sports offered between 1981 to 1998 when compared to their population in the student body, with Black women being moderately underrepresented in six sports and severely underrepresented in fourteen.¹⁴ This statistic demonstrates how Title IX increased the number of women's sports that were offered in higher education, but these sports were catered toward white middle-class women who could afford to participate, making these new sports largely inaccessible to Black athletes.¹⁵ Due to this, in addition to racial stereotyping, clustering had become a result. Black women were limited to only specific college sport programs. For example, in 1996, it was noted

¹³ Jennifer Butler and Donna A. Lopiano, *The Women's Sports Foundation Report: Title IX and Race in Intercollegiate Sport* (New York: Women's Sport Foundation, 2003), 14, https://www.womenssportsfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/title_ix_and_race_full.pdf.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Moneque Walker Pickett, Marvin P. Dawkins, and Jomills Henry Braddock, "Race and Gender Equity in Sports: Have White and African American Females Benefited Equally From Title IX?," *American Behavioral Scientist* 56, no. 11 (2012): 1586, <https://doi-org.proxy.queensu.ca/10.1177/0002764212458282>.

in a study that Black women made up around 15% of women in college sports, although these athletes were clustered in track and basketball.¹⁶ Additionally, at this time new sports programs were appearing in colleges across the United States which were focused toward white, middle-class athletes, further concentrating Black women into low-cost sports programs and excluding them from athletic opportunities.¹⁷ For example, in 1995 emerging sports in the NCAA were rugby, equestrian, water polo and hockey, all of which catered to white women, causing these programs to pull primarily from a white middle-class pool of athletes.¹⁸ As a result, more scholarship opportunities were diverted from Black women's opportunities in sports, as new scholarships and funding would be taken from "Black sports" such as basketball and track, thus making post-secondary education much more inaccessible for Black women in sport.¹⁹ As a result, race not only impacted the representation of Black women in collegiate athletics in the early years of Title IX's implementation, but also caused a concentration of Black women into specific programs of college sport. These impacts of race demonstrate how Black women's engagement in athletics was negatively affected as they did not receive the same amount of benefits that white women were experiencing under Title IX. Thus, the law failed to address the intersections of gender and race and limited its ability to truly impact all females' ability to engage in sports. Title IX's failure to engage all women in sports is further shown through Black women's experiences of being silenced in athletics during the late 90s, illustrating how race impacted women's engagement as Black women felt invisible in college sports.

¹⁶ Moneque Walker Pickett, Marvin P. Dawkins, and Jomills Henry Braddock, "Race and Gender Equity in Sports: Have White and African American Females Benefited Equally From Title IX?," *American Behavioral Scientist* 56, no. 11 (2012): 1587, <https://doi-org.proxy.queensu.ca/10.1177/0002764212458282>.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 1586.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

In the 1998-1999 academic school year, around twenty-five years after Title IX's passing, data was collected to see how twelve African American females felt about their experiences as college athletes.²⁰ In the interviews, pseudonyms were provided for each woman's name, so that these women could share their thoughts without fearing the backlash they might experience for sharing their stories.²¹ The data collected from these interviews found an overall silencing of Black women in higher education athletics, as these women felt underrepresented in the media and they believed they lacked a voice in the space of athletics.²² These women felt as if they were rendered invisible in the societal institution of sport, especially due to the fact they simultaneously were members of two minority groups.²³ Each participant commented on the lack of media for African American women, which was furthered when Dianne stated, "I think that there would be more [participation] of African American women in sports if they [the media] publicized it more."²⁴ Dianne's quote directly connects representation with the advancement and continued engagement of Black women in college sports, as she illustrates how Black girls not seeing themselves in the media would translate into fewer youth who would strive to engage in higher education sports. Her recognition of the importance of media in the advancement of Black women in sports is crucial to consider, as the influence of the media is powerful, especially for children in terms of athletic participation. She illustrates the sad reality of the silencing of Black voices in the media as dangerous as the lack of awareness of Black achievements had a high likelihood of resulting in not as many post-secondary possibilities for African American women. This is especially true with track, as Gabby, another participant, reflected on the media's inability

²⁰ Jennifer E. Bruening, Ketra L. Armstrong, and Donna L. Pastore, "Listening to the Voices: The Experiences of African American Female Student Athletes," *Research Quarterly for Exercise and Sport* 76, no. 1 (2005): 82, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02701367.2005.10599264>.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 86.

²² *Ibid.*, 83-84.

²³ *Ibid.*, 84.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 89.

to showcase African American women's achievements when she stated in her interview, "how many times do I turn on NBC and see track?"²⁵ Through this quote, Gabby illustrates how the media impacts Black women's engagement in sports as it actively ignores African American women in athletics and instead tailors itself to capitalist ideals, as it showcases white talent to maintain a large white audience. She illustrates how race and its connection with capital was even a consideration of corporations and networks, which risked the engagement of Black women in college sports due to underrepresentation in media. Therefore, both quotes from Dianne and Gabby illustrate how race impacted women's engagement in sports as the media's lack of coverage of African American athletes made Black athletes feel silenced in college athletics, further impacting the engagement of African American women in the future due to underrepresentation occurring through the media. The impacts of race on women's participation in higher education sports was additionally analyzed in the study when the interviewees reflected on seeing themselves as silenced due to on-campus factors.

In their interviews, these women mentioned how athletic administration was a factor in making African American females in college sports feel silenced. One of the women who was mentioned previously, Gabby, was on the Title IX committee and shared her experiences, "They [the athletic administration] are very determined that everything is accurate numbers-wise as far as financially for each time, but I think it gets lost somewhere in the chain... No matter what happens at this school when you cut to the chase, they're always going to look at their men's athletics. That is their focus. The underlying rule about this athletic program is that whatever we

²⁵ Jennifer E. Bruening, Ketra L. Armstrong, and Donna L. Pastore, "Listening to the Voices: The Experiences of African American Female Student Athletes," *Research Quarterly for Exercise and Sport* 76, no. 1 (2005): 91, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02701367.2005.10599264>.

got to do to keep the football team the way we want it, we'll add more women."²⁶ Through this quote, Gabby illustrates how her school was unique in the sense that it went further than Title IX's policy in considering race when awarding scholarships, but the factor of race was simply a matter of checking a box, and thus the athletics administration's concern of race in sport at her college was superficial. Instead, she shifts a focus onto her administration's fixation on male athletics, specifically football, which is a Black male dominated sport. Therefore, Gabby shows the importance of viewing this issue through an intersectional lens, as the intersectional nature of being Black and female affected one's engagement in sport. They were viewed as merely a number, not a significant athlete like their male counterpart, contributing to their experience of feeling silenced in college athletics. Hence, Gabby demonstrates that Title IX might have given Black women a greater opportunity to engage in athletics, but this did not change the societal mindset of sex determining the value of a Black body's engagement in collegiate sports. This conversation developed further as the women recounted their experiences with coaches and other student athletes. One of the women interviewed named Madison outlined her experience on the track and field team, "[distance] girls are predominately White, and they won't even know our names."²⁷ Additionally, another woman in the track and field program named Taz recalled how her coaches reinforced this mentality, "The coaches don't even know the . . . names' of the other athletes and 'there is no effort to integrate us."²⁸ These quotes illustrate how race impacted Black women's engagement in sport as some Black women felt unable to be truly included in their team's environment due to the unwillingness of their fellow teammates and coaches to respect

²⁶ Jennifer E. Bruening, Ketra L. Armstrong, and Donna L. Pastore, "Listening to the Voices: The Experiences of African American Female Student Athletes," *Research Quarterly for Exercise and Sport* 76, no. 1 (2005): 92, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02701367.2005.10599264>.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 93.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

their participation in college athletes. The inability of white teammates and coaches to remember Black women's names demonstrated their lack of acceptance regarding African American women in collegiate athletics, as they did not recognize Black women in this space. Therefore, this experience of disrespect would affect Black women's engagement in college sports as they would not feel welcomed within the environment of their own program, and thus feel silenced within their sport and team.

An additional subject that was acknowledged in these interviews, but not expanded on, was the sexualization of Black female athletes and the role of sexual harassment in affecting the engagement of African American women in college sports. One area in which Title IX extends is sexual harassment cases.²⁹ Title IX does not specifically identify the term sexual harassment, but instead, it has been interpreted by the Supreme Court that it applies to sexual harassment due to the discriminatory nature of the topic.³⁰ Yet, studies have revealed an overall failure of Title IX to deter sexual harassment, especially for Black women in college. Although many of the studies conducted on this topic were performed during the twenty-first century, they reveal how this issue is not static, instead, they illustrate how the sexual harassment of Black women in college has been an ongoing problem in American culture that has allowed for this violence and racial discrimination to occur for decades.³¹ The results of one study found that sexual harassment was experienced by 63% of the Black female undergraduate participants after the age of eighteen, and of these women, more than 50% experienced another form of racial discrimination or

²⁹ Diane Heckman, "Title IX and Sexual Harassment Claims Involving Educational Athletic Department Employees and Student-Athletes in the Twenty-First Century," *Virginia Sports and Entertainment Law Journal* 8, no. 2 (2009): 232, <https://heinonline.org/HOL/P?h=hein.journals/virspelj8&i=227>.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 231-232.

³¹ Jennifer M. Gómez, "Campus Sexual Harassment, Other Violence, and Racism, Oh My! Evidence From Black Women Undergraduates for a Culturally Competent University Approach to Title IX," *Feminist Criminology* 17, no. 3 (2022): 369-370, <https://doi-org.proxy.queensu.ca/10.1177/15570851211062574>.

violence.³² This commonly made Black college women develop mental health issues and trauma symptoms, such as anxiety, sleeping issues, and depression.³³ As a result, this study does not only demonstrate the ongoing issue of sexual harassment against African American college women, but also that racial discrimination in conjunction with sexual harassment uniquely impacts anxiety and mental health for Black women, making victimization experiences even more severe due to the intersectional nature of race and gender.³⁴ Such experiences are evident through the interviews this paper has already examined of Black women who were college athletes during the 1998-1999 academic year. For example, in Gabby's interview, she notes, "There have been times that we've been asked to put more clothes on... I was more clothed than half of the girls walking on campus were. The strength coach came over and said it was disturbing the guys and I should put on a shirt."³⁵ Another woman named Lolita also stated in her interview, "A lot of the women athletes, primarily the African American women athletes, are basically associated with sex. You look good and you have a great body and you drive men crazy... We have an attitude, because we come in there to work, and we get stared at."³⁶ These quotes illustrate how they experienced sexual harassment under Title IX, as they were merely viewed as sexual objects due to their race. Instances such as this illustrate how race impacted women's engagement in sports as the negative sexual stereotypes African American women experienced caused them to be sexualized more than their white counterparts, and thus, they received poorer treatment in athletics. This difference in treatment then had the impact of

³² Jennifer M. Gómez, "Campus Sexual Harassment, Other Violence, and Racism, Oh My! Evidence From Black Women Undergraduates for a Culturally Competent University Approach to Title IX," *Feminist Criminology* 17, no. 3 (2022): 372, <https://doi-org.proxy.queensu.ca/10.1177/15570851211062574>.

³³ *Ibid.*, 373–374.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 375.

³⁵ Jennifer E. Bruening, Ketra L. Armstrong, and Donna L. Pastore, "Listening to the Voices: The Experiences of African American Female Student Athletes," *Research Quarterly for Exercise and Sport* 76, no. 1 (2005): 94, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02701367.2005.10599264>.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 95.

interfering with their success, not only in sports, but in academics as well due to the effects harassment could have on one's mental health. Consequently, through their experiences of increased sexual harassment, which Title IX failed to deter, African American women's engagement in sports was hindered as the physical and mental toll of this harassment interfered with their ability to focus solely on their sport, thus resulting in a feeling of being silenced within athletics.

Title IX was intended to enact change for all women, but failed to do so. The effect of race's impact on engagement in sports is evident through the analysis of what occurred directly after Title IX's implementation. Black women were continuously underrepresented in college athletics, not given as many scholarship opportunities, and clustered into specific sports due to Title IX not recognizing the socio-economic barriers and racial stereotypes that affected African American women. Additionally, race impacted women's engagement in athletics as the media, athletic administrations, coaches, and student athletes made African American women feel silenced within collegiate programs. Therefore, Title IX's approach to equal opportunities in sports did not consider the discrimination that occurs due to the intersection of race and gender, thus demonstrating why Black women struggled within college athletics, and continue to in the present day. For African American women to truly have an equal opportunity to participate in American collegiate athletics as white women, Title IX must acknowledge race in its policies.

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