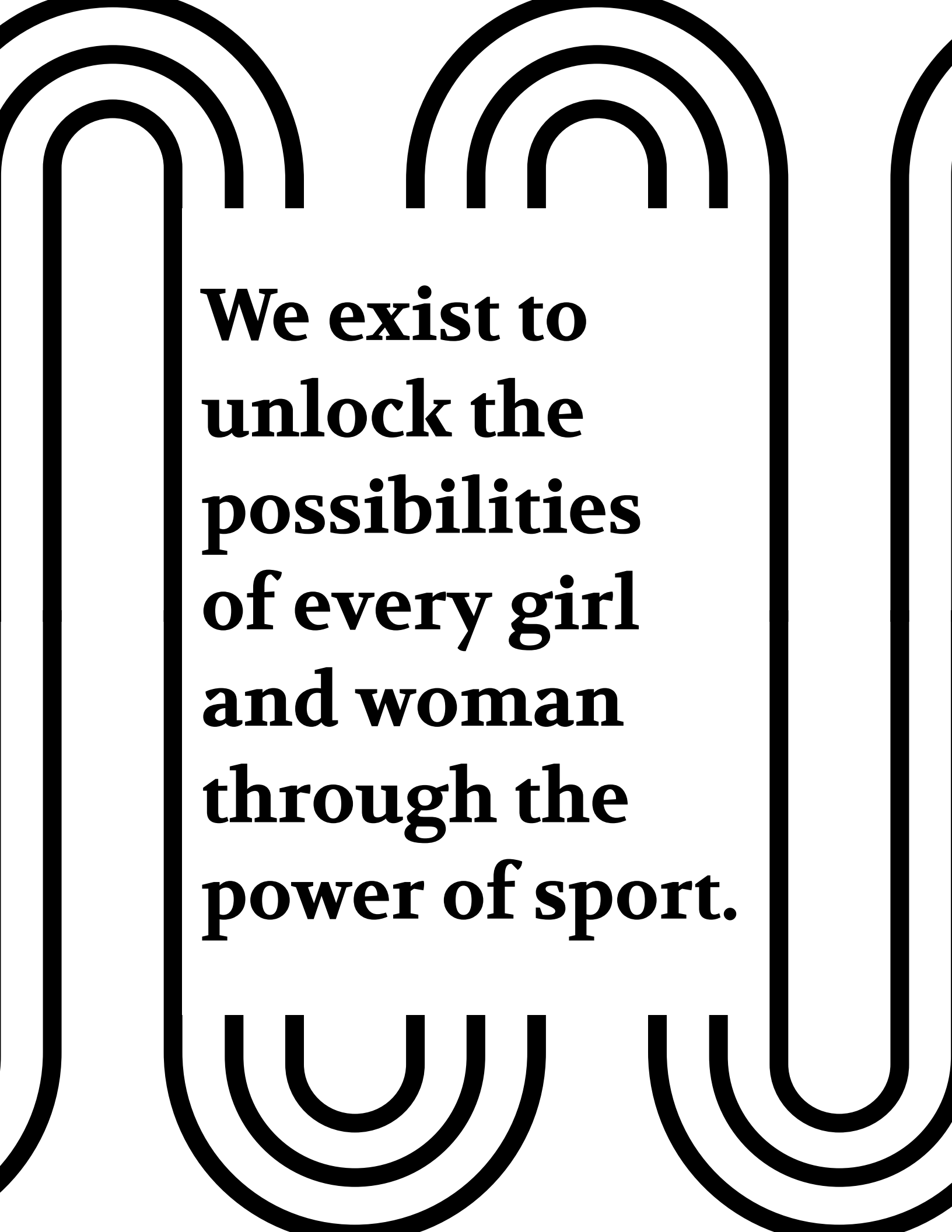




# Chasing Equity:

The Triumphs, Challenges,  
and Opportunities in Sports  
for Girls and Women

A decorative border consisting of three vertical columns of overlapping arches. Each arch is formed by two parallel black lines, creating a sense of depth and rhythm. The arches are arranged in a staggered pattern, with the top of one arch in one column overlapping the bottom of an arch in the adjacent column.

**We exist to  
unlock the  
possibilities  
of every girl  
and woman  
through the  
power of sport.**



**The time for equity is now.**

At the Women's Sports Foundation, we recognize that knowledge is power. WSF's latest report, *Chasing Equity: The Triumphs, Challenges and Opportunities in Sports for Girls and Women* shines a light on the current landscape for girls and women in sport reflected in the latest data from more than 500 research reports and results from a new national survey of more than 2,300 women working in women's sport. Taking stock of where we are in achieving gender equity in sport requires study, transparency and candor. This groundbreaking report brings together the latest facts and milestones and elevates the voices of women offering fresh insight and perspective. Importantly the report includes calls to action to help propel momentum for change. Stakeholders in all areas of sport, from grassroots to high school, college and elite athletics, collegiate administrators, coaches, policymakers, leaders in the corporate and media sectors all have a critical role to play. WSF is committed to keeping these conversations at the forefront and working collaboratively with others to accelerate the pace of change.

Continued progress depends on comprehensive, up-to-date information in real time. Only when we operate from a shared understanding of the landscape can we ensure thoughtful conversation and sound decision-making necessary for progress. From playing fields to board rooms, girls and women continue to live out their passion for sport. As these accomplishments are celebrated, let's continue to examine the gaps and opportunities to ensure that all girls and all women can get in the game. Only then will we be able to realize the full potential unleashed by sport. All girls. All women. All sports.



**Dr. Deborah Antoine, CEO, Women's Sports Foundation**

## Acknowledgements

This report was authored by Ellen J. Staurowsky, Ed.D.; Nicholas Watanabe, Ph.D.; Joseph Cooper, Ph.D.; Cheryl Cooky, Ph.D.; Nancy Lough, Ph.D.; Amanda Paule-Koba, Ph.D.; Jennifer Pharr, Ph.D.; Sarah Williams, Ph.D.; Sarah Cummings, Ph.D.; Karen Issokson-Silver, MPH and Marjorie Snyder, Ph.D. Research support was provided by Clémence Henry and Susanna Pennfield. A panel of experts assisted with project development, reviewed the female leader survey and the report, and made important changes – Kathryn Ackerman, M.D., MPH; Sarah Axelson, MPA; Megan Bartlett; Leeja Carter, Ph.D.; Sarah Crennan; Kathy DeBoer; Kathleen Francis; Pat Griffin, Ph.D.; Robin Harris; Megan Kahn; Richard Lapchick, Ph.D.; Deborah Slaner Larkin; Nicole LaVoi, Ph.D.; Jayma Meyers, JD; Meghan Morgan; Diane Milutinovich; Celene Reynolds; Don Sabo, Ph.D.; Vivian Santora; Carol Stiff; Judy Sweet; Sandy Vivas; Chris Voelz; and Andy Whitcomb. Karen Issokson-Silver, MPH and Marjorie Snyder, Ph.D., directed the project. The copyeditor was Deana Monahan, and the report was designed by Amsterland. The Women's Sports Foundation thanks its National Partners Chevrolet, espnW and ESPN, Gatorade, and NBC Sports Group for their year-round support and commitment to help strengthen and expand opportunities for all girls and all women through all sports.

## About the Women's Sports Foundation

The Women's Sports Foundation exists to enable girls and women to reach their potential in sports and life. We are an ally, an advocate and a catalyst. Founded by Billie Jean King in 1974, we strengthen and expand participation and leadership opportunities through research, advocacy, community programming and a wide variety of collaborative partnerships. The Women's Sports Foundation has positively shaped the lives of millions of youth, high school and collegiate student-athletes, elite athletes and coaches. We're building a future where every girl and woman can #KeepPlaying and unlock the lifelong benefits of sport participation. *All girls. All women. All sports.* To learn more about the Women's Sports Foundation, please visit [WomensSportsFoundation.org](http://WomensSportsFoundation.org) or follow us at [@WomensSportsFdn](https://www.facebook.com/WomensSportsFdn) and [www.Facebook.com/WomensSportsFoundation](https://www.facebook.com/WomensSportsFoundation). Contact us at [info@WomensSportsFoundation.org](mailto:info@WomensSportsFoundation.org) or toll-free at 800.227.3988.

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Preferred citation: Staurowsky, E. J., Watanabe, N., Cooper, J., Cooky, C., Lough, N., Paule-Koba, A., Pharr, Williams, S., Cummings, S., Issokson-Silver, K., & Snyder, M. (2020). Chasing Equity: The Triumphs, Challenges, and Opportunities in Sports for Girls and Women. New York, NY: Women's Sports Foundation.

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## Introduction

In this report, we examine the state of girls' and women's sports in the United States through a broad lens, looking at the triumphs, the challenges, and the tremendous opportunities that are yet to be realized. The areas we focus on include sport participation opportunities for girls and women; the benefits of sport participation for girls and women; the barriers that limit and/or hinder participation; critical health and safety concerns of females in sport; Title IX and its ongoing role in supporting the infrastructure for equal access to sport participation for girls and women; the representation of women working in the sport industry and the climate they encounter while working in sport, including pay equity and equal treatment issues; the level and quality of sport media coverage of female athletes; and the representation of women working in sport media.

Using these findings, we developed calls to action that address perennial issues that have held girls and women back from participating and working in U.S. sport as fully enfranchised peers and colleagues of boys and men. To supplement this effort, we also undertook a nationally representative survey of U.S. female sport leaders (N=2,356) from across all sectors of girls' and women's sport (youth, high school, college, elite/Olympic, and professional) to gauge their thinking about where progress has been made, where things have stalled, and what steps they recommend be taken to empower girls and women further as participants and as workers within sport organizations in the United States. Selected findings from that survey are interwoven throughout this report. The full report can be found on [WomensSportsFoundation.org](http://WomensSportsFoundation.org). Highlighted here are major takeaways from the report, along with selected calls to action.



# The Benefits of Sport Participation

Sport participation is critical to empowering U.S. girls and women. While there are legions of studies that document the physical, psychological, social, and academic benefits of consistent participation in physical activity and sport as detailed in Table 1, these findings cannot be emphasized enough. Girls and women reap significant benefits from sport participation that are both immediate and long-term, and ensuring that all U.S. girls and women have access to sport and physical activity is key to the health and the success of the nation.

Table 1



## Physical Benefits

- Lower risk of obesity
- Lower blood pressure
- Higher levels of cardio-respiratory fitness
- Reduced risk of cardiovascular disease
- Reduced risk of breast cancer



## Social/Emotional Benefits

- Improved psychological well-being
- Greater life satisfaction
- Stronger sense of belonging
- Improved self-esteem
- Reduced symptoms of depression, anxiety, and stress



## Academic/Leadership Benefits

- Improved academic achievement
- Higher high school graduation rates
- Higher college attendance and retention
- Greater involvement in extracurricular activities
- Opportunities for leadership and learning

**I just think participation in sport does so much for the well-being of girls – it builds their confidence, helps manage stress/mental health, and prepares them to handle failure, knowing that the next day may be when they win. It is great preparation for a career.**

*– Respondent, Female Leaders in Sport Survey*

# Methodology

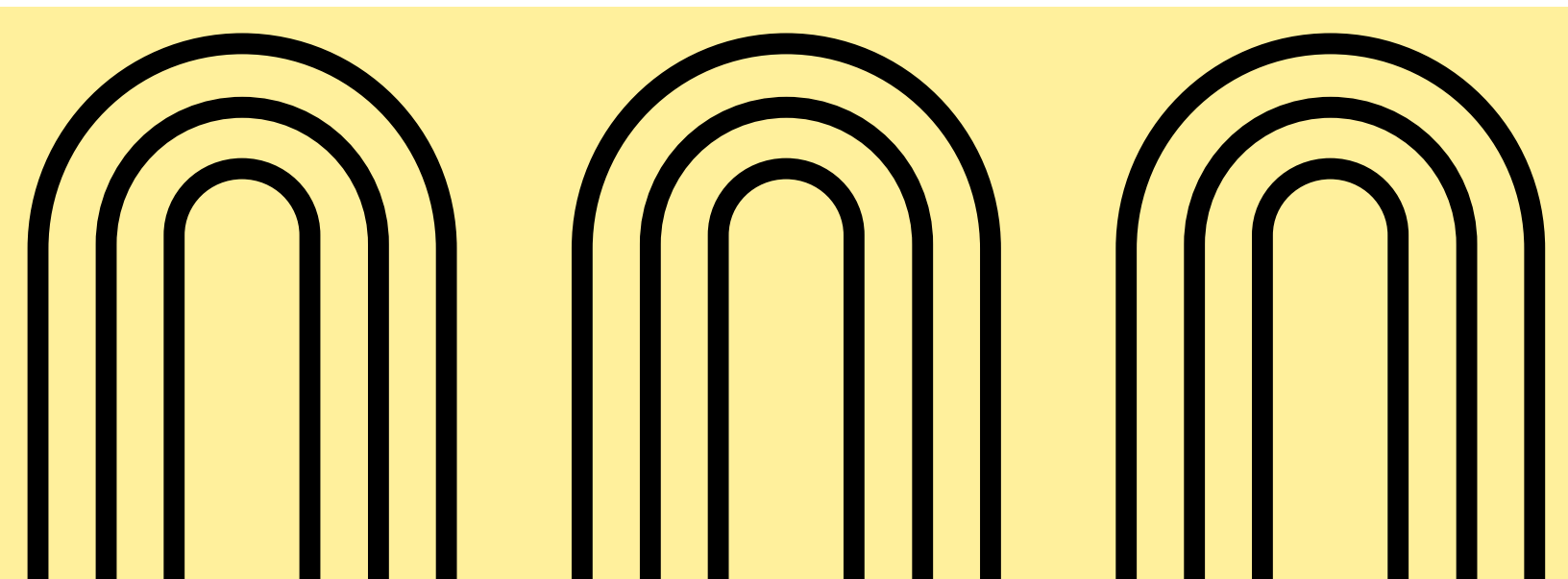
## **500 research studies and reports**

The information presented in this report draws upon both primary and secondary sources. A team of researchers conducted an extensive literature review of nearly 500 research studies and reports from scholars, sport governing bodies and public policy organizations; a review of public reports filed by colleges and universities, including selected lawsuits; and a review of media reports primarily spanning the time period between 2014-19 with the goal of identifying, gathering, analyzing, and reporting facts and findings that describe the realities for girls and women in sport in the United States.

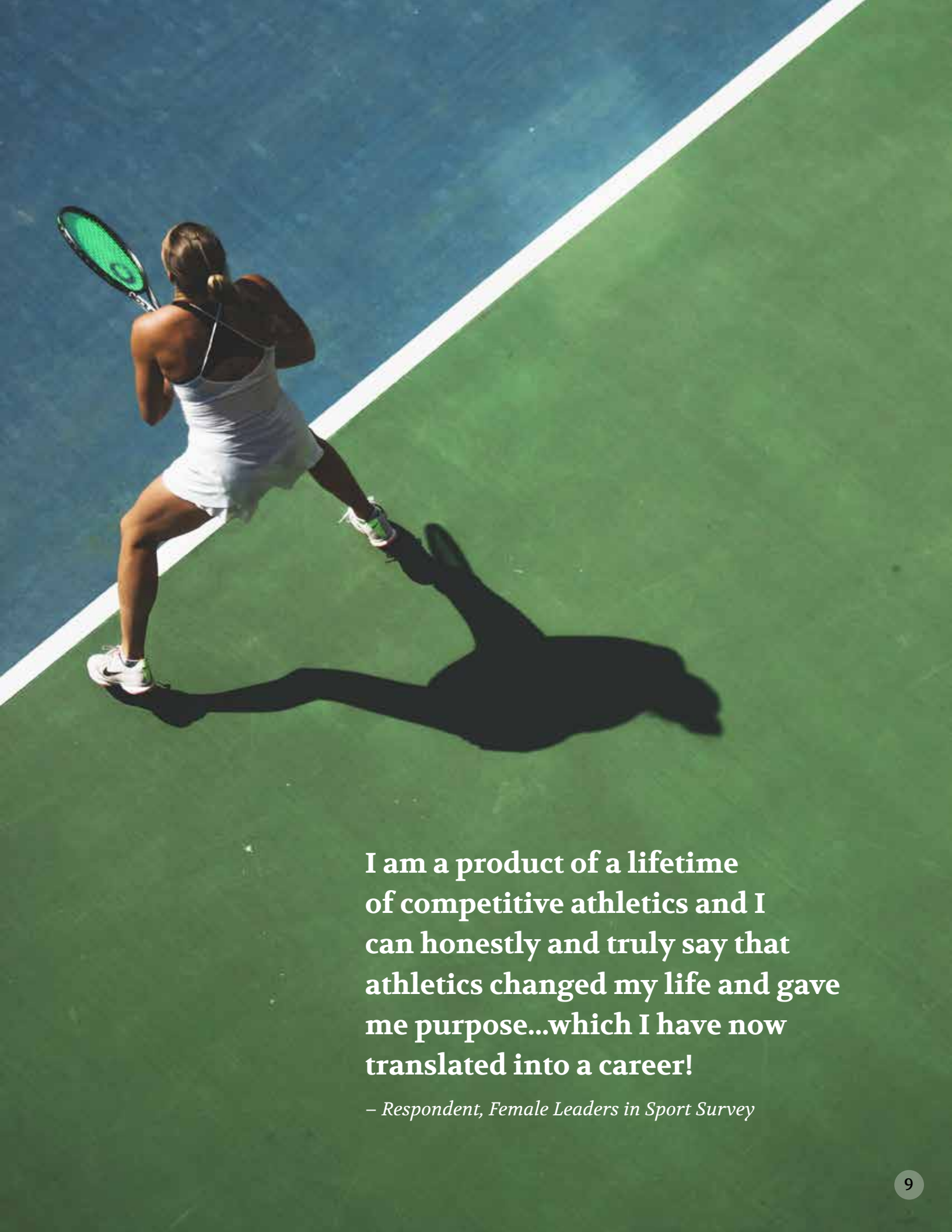
## **A survey of 2,356 female leaders**

In an effort to capture the perceptions of women leaders on the landscape for U.S. girls and women in sport, probe the impact of persistent barriers to progress, and identify steps to be taken to move beyond those barriers, the primary research component of this study was a survey of 2,356 female leaders of girls' and women's sports in the United States, including coaches, athletic directors, executives, owners, researchers, journalists, and sports medicine professionals from all levels of sport. On average they had been working in sport for at least 10 years. The 31-question survey was reviewed by members of a Women's Sports Foundation expert panel (N=24) and was approved for distribution by the Drexel University Institutional Review Board (IRB). Using the online data collection platform of Qualtrics, the survey was administered using a snowball sampling method. The data collected through the survey were subjected to quantitative and qualitative analyses.

The responses from these U.S. female sport leaders were used in two ways within the report. They were used to highlight and illuminate research findings found through the literature review and to provide depth and dimension to the recommended calls to action proposed in the report.







**I am a product of a lifetime  
of competitive athletics and I  
can honestly and truly say that  
athletics changed my life and gave  
me purpose...which I have now  
translated into a career!**

*– Respondent, Female Leaders in Sport Survey*



# Key Highlights

## 1

### **Making Headway: Access for Girls Is On the Rise**

When examined in its totality, with all sectors of sport from youth through professional levels considered, girls and women have improved access to sport opportunities. Girls across the United States participate in a wide array of sport programs offered by organizations with school-based, community-based, church-based, travel-based, or other affiliations.<sup>1</sup> Girls participate in not only traditional youth sports like Amateur Athletic Union (AAU) basketball or American Youth Soccer Organization (AYSO) soccer programs but also sport programs that combine sports with positive youth development lessons (e.g., Girls on the Run). According to the National Federation of State High School Associations, girls' high school sport participation reached an all-time high for the 29th consecutive year in the United States, with 3,415,306 opportunities for girls to compete in high school sports in 2017-18, and only dropped slightly in 2018-19 to 3,402,733.<sup>2</sup> Girls have 42.9% of all high school opportunities. During the 2017-18 season, there were 216,378 female athletic opportunities offered by National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) member institutions (44.2%), representing a 291% increase from 1981-82.<sup>3</sup> The representation of American women in the 2016 Olympic Games was unprecedented, with the U.S. delegation of 292 women being the largest in Olympic history.<sup>4</sup> The Women's National Basketball Association (WNBA), the longest-running women's professional team sport league in the world, celebrated its 23rd consecutive season in existence in 2019. The U.S. National Women's Soccer Team won the World Cup for a record fourth time and the Women's World Cup will be expanded from 24 to 32 teams by 2023. Across the board, more girls and women are accessing the significant benefits of sports participation.



Track & Field – Outdoor

488,267



Volleyball

452,808



Basketball

399,067



Soccer

394,105

## Ten most popular

Girls' high school sports by numbers of participation opportunities

Source: National Federation of State High School Associations, 2019.



Softball

362,038



Cross Country

219,345



Tennis

189,436



Swimming & Diving

173,088



Competitive Spirit

161,358



Lacrosse

99,750



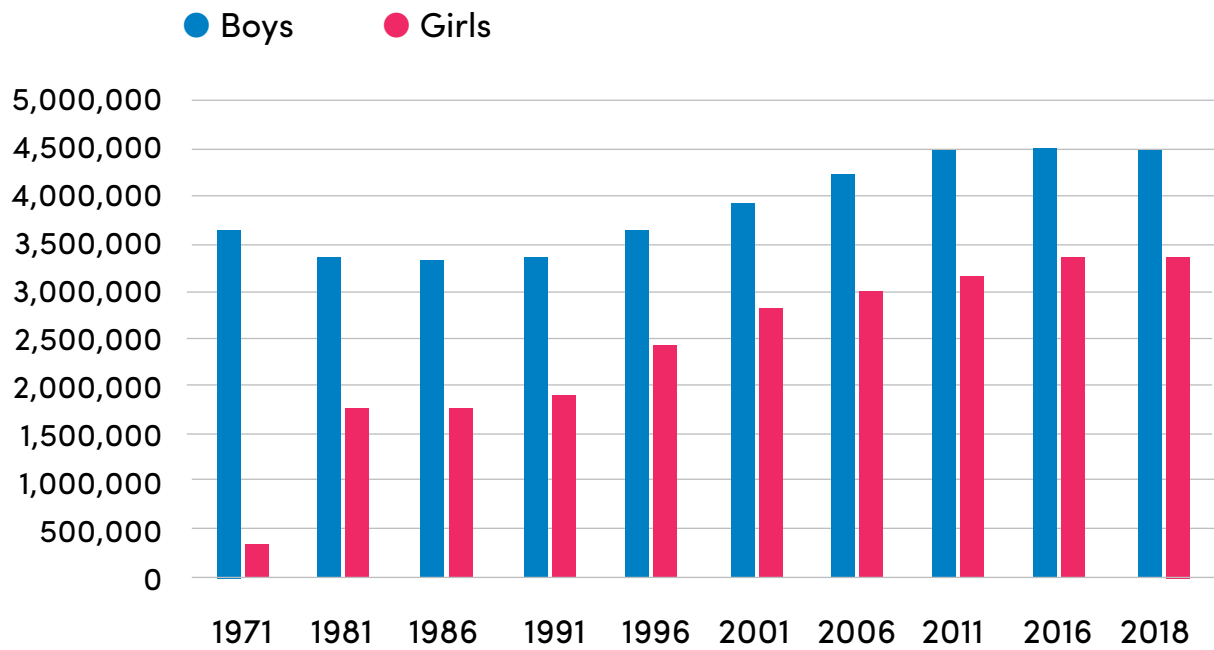
**When someone says  
'you play like a girl,'  
ask them 'which one?'**

*—Mallory Pugh, U.S. Women's Soccer Player*



## Touch Points in History

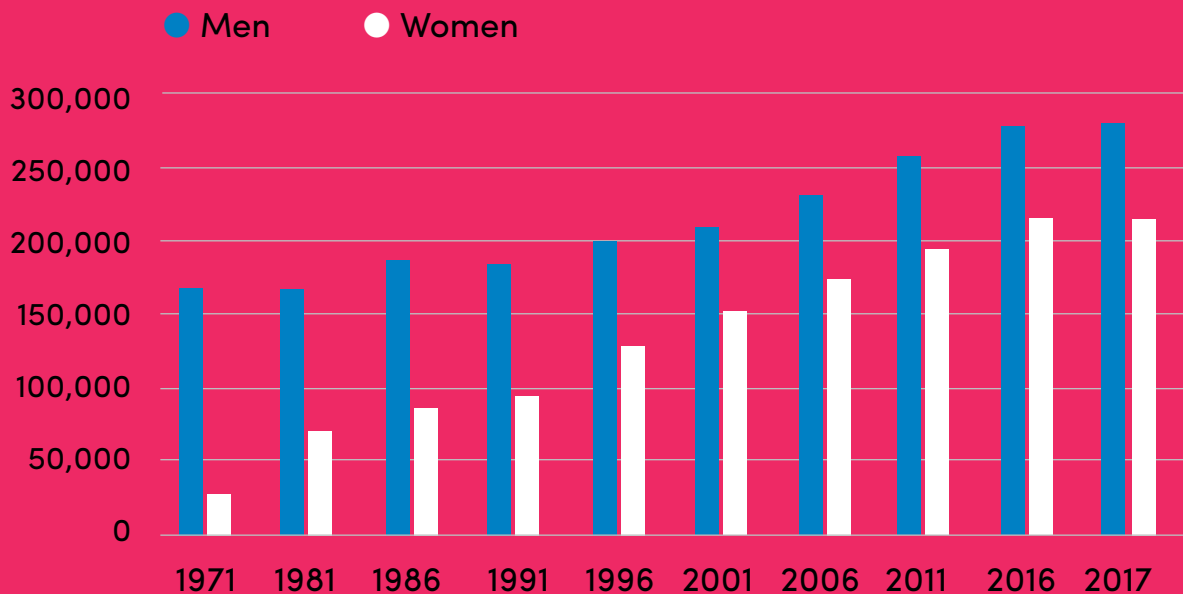
High School Athletics Participation Survey Totals 1971-72 -2018-19



Source: National Federation of State High School Associations 2018-19 Athletics Participation Summary

## Touch Points in History

College Sports Participation 1971-72 -2017-18



Source: NCAA Sponsorship & Participation Rates Report 1981-82 - 2017-18



# 2

## Closing the Divide: Gender Gap in Participation Persists

Girls enter sports later, participate in fewer numbers, and exit earlier than boys.<sup>5</sup> As a general trend, between the ages of 6 to 10, girls' participation in sport lags behind that of boys by 10 percentage points.<sup>6</sup> In 2017, the sport participation gap had narrowed to 4% among eighth graders but is the largest at 14% among 12th graders.<sup>7</sup> Boys are also more likely than girls to play two or more sports (47% vs. 29%).<sup>8</sup> Annually, boys receive more than 1.13 million more high school sports opportunities than girls,<sup>9</sup> and the gap between high school boys' and girls' participation has not significantly narrowed in the past 20 years.<sup>10</sup> At the college level, in 2017-18 women had 62,236 fewer participation opportunities than men in NCAA sports.<sup>11</sup> At the professional level, there are so few viable opportunities in sports like women's volleyball and basketball, women have to pursue professional careers overseas. The 30 NBA teams can each have up to 15 players,<sup>12</sup> while the 12 WNBA teams are limited to 12 roster spots.<sup>13</sup> The six National Pro Fastpitch Softball teams are limited to 26 players for a total of 156 players,<sup>14</sup> while the 30 Major League Baseball regular-season rosters are limited to 25 for a total of 750 players.<sup>15</sup> Much work remains before fair access at all levels of sports is achieved.





## Play sports on a regular basis for kids 6-12

Boys	Girls
38.6%	31.4%

## Participate in at least one team sport for kids 6-12

Boys	Girls
61.9%	52.3%

(Aspen Institute, 2018)

## Total number of professional sport opportunities

WNBA	NBA	NPFS	MLB
144	450	156	750

(WNBA, 2019; NBA, 2019; Sievers, 2017; MLB, 2019)



## FEMALE LEADERS IN SPORT SURVEY (2019)

### Access & Opportunities: Factors Impacting Participation in Sport

#### Financial and Operational

Leaders generally noted that lack of access to opportunities had the greatest negative impact on girls' participation in sport over the last 10 years.

The greatest concern regarding girls' participation in sport was the ability of their parents to afford participation fees and access to transportation to take them to and from practices/games.

Youth leaders felt that access to quality facilities/resources and equal treatment were more of a barrier to participation than leaders from other areas of sport.

#### Social and Behavioral

Leaders generally noted that sedentary behaviors (e.g., increased screen time) had the greatest negative impact on girls' participation in sport over the last 10 years.

Other factors identified as having a negative impact on participation included competing demands for time due to academics or other extracurricular activities.

Girls' knowledge of how to get involved was viewed as having one of the greatest positive impacts on girls' participation in sport.

2X

The drop-out rate for girls of color in urban and rural centers is twice that of suburban white girls (Sabo & Veliz, 2008)

Dropout rates of girls by the age of 14

24%  
urban

13%  
rural

6%  
suburban

(Sabo & Veliz, 2008)

3

### Sport for All: More Resources Are Needed for Girls of Color and Other Marginalized Communities

Girls of color, girls of lower socioeconomic status, and girls in urban and rural areas often enter sports later, participate in lower numbers, and drop out earlier than White girls, suburban girls, and girls from higher socioeconomic status. For example, the drop-out rate for girls of color in urban centers is twice that of suburban White girls. By the age of 14, 24% of girls in urban areas dropped out, while 13% of girls from rural areas dropped out by this age, and 6% of girls from suburban areas dropped out by this age.<sup>16</sup> In a comparison between White and African American girls, White girls were found to be three times more likely to be involved in sport through a private organization (21% to 7%). African American girls were more likely to participate in programs offered through schools (65%, compared to 50%).<sup>17</sup> The disparate rates at which African American and White girls participate in physical activity have been attributed to African American girls being more likely to attend schools with fewer resources and higher poverty rates. This impacts material resources (gymnasiums and fields), human resources (coaches), and programs and opportunities to play. Because of the vast resource gaps available in typical heavily minority high schools (less than 10% White enrollment), girls of color have access to far fewer athletic participation opportunities than students attending typical heavily White high schools (90% White enrollment).<sup>18</sup>

Youth from other marginalized groups also participate in sport in lower numbers. From a gender perspective, boys with disabilities consistently participate in sport at higher rates than girls with disabilities.<sup>19</sup> According to the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS),<sup>20</sup> of the 15,571 high school students who participated in adapted sport activities during the 2018–19 academic year, 44% were female students (6,960). Girls in immigrant families report lower rates of sport participation than boys from similar families as many immigrant parents hold traditional attitudes towards gender roles.<sup>21, 22, 23</sup> In a study by the Human Rights Campaign,<sup>24</sup> while 68% of all high school students participated in sport, only 29% of LGBTQ girls participated.



**We work with girls in under-served neighborhoods and many have decided very young, that they are not athletes. Early exposure and participation is critical!**

*– Respondent, Female Leaders in Sport Survey*



**Title IX is being eroded. Schools have too many years to “improve” but not correct.**

*– Respondent, Female Leaders in Sport Survey*



## Key Highlights

# 4

### **Measure for Measure: Title IX Compliance Falls Short**

Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 comprises 37 words that have had a profound impact on the educational experiences of students by generally barring sex discrimination in schools supported with federal funding and non-educational institutions that offer educational programming. Described by one author as the “little statute that could,” Title IX helped to open the doors of opportunity for girls and women in previously male-dominated fields and professions, thus creating pathways for more girls to dream of becoming – and more women to become – astronauts, carpenters, executives, journalists, lawyers, mechanics, physicians, presidential candidates, military officers, and professional athletes. As Title IX approaches its 50th birthday in 2022, there is no doubt that the law has had a major positive impact on the prospects and possibilities available for girls and women in sport. The work, however, is not yet done.

Gender gaps persist in the offering of athletic opportunities to female athletes and across every resource category in National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA), National Junior College Athletic Association (NJCAA), California Community College Athletic Association (CCCCAA), and other college and university athletic departments. The vast majority of institutions across all three NCAA divisions – 87% or 943 of 1,084 institutions – offered disproportionately higher rates of athletic opportunities to male athletes compared to their enrollment. In 2017-18, only 8.6% of NCAA Division I institutions (30 of 348) offered athletic opportunities to female athletes proportional to their enrollment. Seventy percent of NCAA Division I schools (245 of 348) offered disproportionately higher numbers of athletic participation opportunities to male athletes, ranging from 2% to 34% above the proportion of male enrollment.<sup>25</sup> While total spending on athletic scholarships in NCAA institutions in Divisions I and II was in excess of \$3 billion, with female athletes receiving 46%, male athletes received \$240,435,504 more in athletic scholarship assistance. At the high school level, despite girls comprising nearly half of the student body,<sup>26</sup> the 3.4 million opportunities for girls to play high school sports in 2017-18 fell well short of the 4.5 million opportunities for boys who played high school sports that year.<sup>27</sup> When all schools are compliant with Title IX, much of the participation gap will disappear.

**Title IX states that:  
No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance.**

**8.6%**

The percent of Division I institutions offering athletic opportunities to female athletes proportional to their enrollment.  
(U.S. Department of Education, 2019)

**87%**

The percent of all three NCAA divisions that offered disproportionately higher rates of athletic opportunities to male athletes compared to their enrollment.  
(U.S. Department of Education, 2019)

## FEMALE LEADERS IN SPORT SURVEY (2019)

### **Views on the Degree to Which Schools Comply with Title IX in the Area of Athletics**

#### **High School (N=877)**

27% reported that schools had a strong or very strong record of compliance.  
31% reported that schools had neither a strong nor a weak record of compliance.  
41% reported that schools had a weak or very weak record of compliance.

#### **College (N=1155)**

44% reported that schools had a strong or very strong record of compliance.  
24% reported that schools had neither a strong nor a weak record of compliance.  
33% reported that schools had a weak or very weak record of compliance.



**My current institution still lags in several areas of equity and I think having more of an external accountability (such as a Title IX review every 3 years) would do wonders for us; it is hard to be a lone voice lobbying for change when the culture is so set in stone.**

*– Respondent, Female Leaders in Sport Survey*



# 5

## Knowledge is Power: Title IX Enforcement Requires Education and Transparency

Every school in the United States receiving federal funding is required to designate a Title IX coordinator to oversee Title IX compliance and education efforts. According to a study of high school athletic administrators conducted by the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) in 2017,<sup>28</sup> an estimated 51% were either unaware of who their Title IX coordinator was or were unsupported by their Title IX coordinator. Being able to identify the Title IX coordinator is critical. In a study of nearly 1,100 college and university coaches, just over 30% were aware of who their Title IX coordinator was; 42.8% were not sure.<sup>29</sup> The U.S. GAO reported that the Office for Civil Rights (OCR) officials were not aware of how closely Title IX coordinators worked with athletic administrators on Title IX compliance. In an interview with officials of an association that conducts Title IX trainings, it was the view of the trainers that high school Title IX coordinators' familiarity with Title IX regulations pertaining to athletics was low.<sup>30</sup> Knowledge of Title IX is low among athletes, coaches, and administrators.<sup>31, 32</sup> In response to the question "what is Title IX?", nearly 40% of college athletes from NCAA Divisions I and III indicated that they did not know what Title IX is (N=210).<sup>33</sup> According to Staurowsky and Weight,<sup>34</sup> 83% of college coaches (N=1,093) reported that they never received any formal training about Title IX as part of preparation for their jobs.

In an effort to foster transparency in terms of the allocation of opportunity and financial resources to men's and women's athletic programs, the Equity in Athletics Disclosure Act (EADA) passed in 1994 requires colleges and universities to annually report participation data and budget allocations broken out by gender. As important as the EADA database has been in shedding light on how resources are allocated by gender within college and university athletic departments, there has been a concern that school administrators are not forthcoming in their self-reporting of information about their institutions. Recent court cases have raised questions as to whether athletic opportunities information has been falsified by some schools for the purpose of presenting a more favorable record in terms of complying with Title IX's three-part test.<sup>35, 36</sup> Title IX accountability is disabled if school administrators, athletic directors, coaches, athletes, parents, fans, media, and others are uninformed or misinformed about what the law requires.<sup>37, 38, 39, 40</sup>

51%

The number of high school athletic administrators who don't know who their Title IX coordinator is. (GAO, 2017)

40%

The number of college athletes who don't know what Title IX is. (Staurowsky & Weight, 2013).

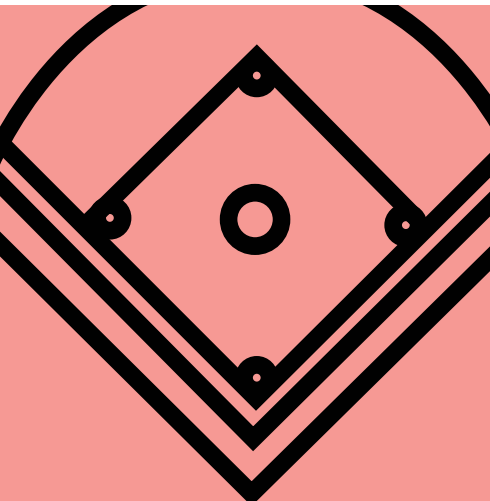
83%

The number of college coaches who say they have never received any formal training about Title IX. (Staurowsky & Weight, 2013).

## 6

**Cracking the Code: Gender Role Beliefs Endure**

Pressures to adhere to narrow gender norms and gender-role stereotypes still influence the way female athletes are viewed and valued and the way that female athletes who do not conform to gender-role scripts are treated. In a national study of 814 parents, it was found that they tended to place a somewhat higher value on sport for their sons than their daughters.<sup>41</sup> Gender-role beliefs held by parents played a small but significant part in the way parents viewed their daughters' participation in sport and the types of sports their daughters played.<sup>42</sup> Peer pressure to conform to gender norms is also at play. In a survey of girls,<sup>43</sup> nearly one-third (32%) of the girls reported that sometimes boys made fun of them or made them feel uncomfortable while they practiced. Nearly one-third of girls (31%) expressed that appearance-related reasons were part of their motivation for their participation. Findings from several studies indicate that African American female athlete concerns about their hair and appearance are barriers to participation<sup>44, 45, 46</sup> and Latina girls cite gender-related teasing and self-consciousness as cause for discomfort in participating in sport.<sup>47</sup> For trans female athletes (athletes who identify as female but were assigned male at birth) and other non-gender-conforming athletes, overt discrimination and prejudice from peers as well as officials discourages participation and subjects them to hostile climates. In an analysis of physical activity disparities between heterosexual and sexual minority youth between the ages of 12 and 22 years using data from the U.S. Growing Up Today study, Calzo et al.<sup>48</sup> found that sexual minorities (lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, mostly heterosexual) were 46%–76% less likely to participate in team sports than their same-sex heterosexual peers. Intolerance to gender non-conformity was identified as a key barrier to participation. According to a survey conducted by Dennison & Kitchen,<sup>49</sup> 84% of Americans indicated that they either witnessed or experienced anti-LGBT attitudes in sport. Immigrant girls also face barriers. Girls in immigrant families report lower rates of sport participation than boys in similar families since many immigrant parents hold traditional attitudes towards gender roles.<sup>50, 51, 52</sup> Female children of immigrant parents may be less likely to participate in sport, as immigrant parents tend to have negative attitudes towards their daughters' sport participation.<sup>53</sup> Beliefs driven by stereotypes and discrimination continue to keep many girls and women from fully participating in sport.



32%

The number of girls who report that sometimes boys make fun of them or make them feel uncomfortable when they practice sports.

31%

Nearly one-third of girls (31%) expressed that appearance-related reasons were part of their motivation for their participation.

(Zarret, et al., 2019)



I watch the marketing from my own kids' schools and there is a ton of support for 'gender appropriate' activities – dance for girls and football for boys but no support for things like soccer which is played equally... when girls see support from schools for gendered activities it carries deep into their lives.

– Respondent, Female Leaders in Sport Survey



**Young girls should not be called “bossy” but should be put in leadership roles on the team to foster and encourage that trait.**

*– Respondent, Female Leaders in Sport Survey*





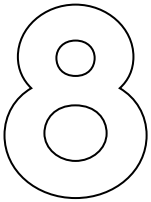
# 7

## In the Spotlight: Headlines Call Out Abusive Behavior

Given the unique aspects of the sport environment, female athletes are vulnerable to verbal, emotional, and sexual abuse. Due to the power imbalance and authoritarian nature of sport, scholars argue athletics is a prime climate for the abuse of athletes.<sup>54, 55, 56</sup> A meta-analysis conducted on literature that examined non-accidental violence in sport found that “non-accidental violence is a pervasive and protracted issue affecting athletes of all types and ages, though children, elite athletes and those from stigmatized groups (e.g., women, LGBTQ, gender non-conforming, and athletes with disabilities) are more vulnerable to non-accidental violence.”<sup>57</sup>

Recently, an awakening has occurred as a result of highly publicized cases of hundreds of female and male athletes suffering sexual abuse by coach and sports medicine predators and testifying in very public ways to the failures of sport officials and organizations to protect them and their fellow athletes. There is growing awareness that sexual abuse in its many forms, from sex abuse to sexual harassment to sexual assault to interpersonal violence to rape, occurs across the expanse of sport spaces and can be perpetrated by individuals in positions of authority (e.g., administrators, performance directors, coaches, members of the media, parents, sports medicine personnel) or may occur between athlete peers and between colleagues.<sup>58</sup> The most prominent sex abuse scandal in sports involved the USA Gymnastics and Michigan State University team doctor, Larry Nassar. Nassar abused and assaulted 265 known individuals over 25 years.<sup>59, 60</sup> It became clear that countless adults in gymnastics centers across the country, USA Gymnastics high-ranking officials, and Michigan State University’s athletic department and administration failed each and every victim Nassar abused. Winning and the pursuit of gold was prioritized over these girls’ and young women’s well-being and safety. While there is much more to be known about the extent of the harm done to athletes individually and collectively throughout the U.S. sport system, female athletes and women working in the sport industry have been particularly vulnerable to this violence and have had to live with its negative impacts.<sup>61, 62</sup> Sexual abuse in athletics is not relegated to coaches and athletes. As discussions continue on how to make sport environments safe for athletes and those who work in them, the data make a compelling case for why these issues must be at the top of agendas for public policy makers, sport administrators, parents, law enforcement, and media.

## Key Highlights



### **Managing Risk: Unique Health Needs and Injuries Can Sideline Girls and Women**

While there is no question that participation in sport presents a multitude of benefits for girls and women that can last a lifetime, participation in any kind of activity can pose health and safety concerns. As a result, it is critical to be aware of vulnerabilities in the sport system that pose potential threats to female athletes and to be responsive to their needs.

From a mental health perspective, due to links between sleep and depression, female athletes may be more vulnerable to depression and anxiety symptoms.<sup>63</sup> In a study of 465 athletes who competed on NCAA-sponsored teams, nearly a third of the women in the study demonstrated signs of depression compared to 18% of men.<sup>64</sup> Data from NCAA surveys from 2008 and 2012 showed that 48% of female collegiate athletes reported having depression or anxiety symptoms.<sup>65</sup>

Female athletes are vulnerable to a medical condition known as the Female Athlete Triad, which includes three components: low energy availability (with or without disordered eating), menstrual dysfunction, and low bone density. Female athletes who may train too hard and/or have complicated relationships with food (e.g., restricting food intake and types of food, bingeing, and/or purging) risk long-term issues with osteoporosis, bone fractures, diminished physical performance, and a range of psychological issues (depression, anxiety, body dysmorphia, obsession with body size, food anxiety, etc.).<sup>66</sup>

Research has shown over the years that female athletes experience some sports injuries, including anterior cruciate ligament (ACL) injuries and concussions, at higher rates than male athletes. One study reported the sport of women's soccer had an ACL injury rate of 2.55 per 10,000 athlete-exposures (AE), which was substantially higher than the men's soccer rate of 0.63 per 10,000 AE. The researchers found a comparable disparity in the sport of basketball (1.95 per 10,000 AE for women versus 0.70 per 10,000 AE for men).<sup>67</sup> At the collegiate level, researchers examined the sex differences in concussion injury rates as reported through the NCAA Injury Surveillance Program. Between 2004-05 and 2008-09, there were 1,702 concussions reported. Further analysis revealed that female athletes had a 1.4 times higher overall concussion injury rate than male athletes. Women's baseball/softball, basketball, ice hockey, and soccer had the greatest injury rates. Additionally, when comparing female and male soccer and basketball players, the female players suffered more time loss after concussion.<sup>68</sup> Several things account for female athletes being at greater risk for concussions in most sports, including head-neck strength and the mechanism of injury.<sup>69</sup> The limited knowledge of female specific health and injury concerns places girls and women at greater risk and can hinder their persistence in sport.



# 48%

The percent of female collegiate athletes who report having had depression or anxiety symptoms. (Brown, Hainline, Kroshus, & Wilfert, 2014)

# 4x

College female soccer players experience ACL injuries at four times the rate of male soccer players. (Covassin, Moran, & Elbin, 2016)

## FEMALE LEADERS IN SPORT SURVEY (2019)

### Perceptions of Social and Behavioral Barriers

#### Impact on Participation

Overall, Olympic/elite and high school leaders had the highest concerns about safety (injuries) affecting female athlete participation in sport over the last 10 years.

Counter to this, recreational league leaders had the least concern about injuries impacting female athlete participation.

Olympic/elite-level leaders also had the highest concerns about sexual abuse impacting female athlete participation in sport.

# 9

## Careers on the Line: Confronting Workplace Bias and Wage Gaps

While the U.S. National Women's Soccer Team's legal battle with the U.S. Soccer Federation over equal pay and equal treatment was arguably the most covered equal pay dispute in women's sport in 2019, women athletes across professional leagues, including the Women's National Basketball Association (WNBA), and women working in youth, college, and professional sport face stark gender inequity in opportunity, pay, and treatment. The juxtaposition of the increase of female sport participation over time with the decrease in the representation of women in sport leadership positions in some sectors of the industry (e.g., high school and college athletic departments) and the slow integration of workplaces in other sectors (e.g., professional men's sport leagues) is an enduring paradox of women working in the sport industry. There has been an expectation that as more girls and women moved into the playing ranks that there would eventually be a proportional increase in hiring women as coaches, administrators, and sport executives, but this has not happened.

As the most recent Race and Gender Report cards from the Institute for Diversity and Ethics in Sport reveal women are underrepresented in positions of power or influence at senior leadership levels across all professional team sports.<sup>70, 71, 72, 73</sup> There has been a precipitous decline in the number of female head coaches in college women's sports (43% in 2017 vs. 90% in 1971).<sup>74</sup> Emblematic of this problematic hiring and retention pattern, less than a quarter (24%) of all head coaches at the college level are women.<sup>75</sup> And of the 9,365 NCAA head coaches of men's teams in 2016-17, only 465 were women (5%). This pattern reveals how some of the most lucrative and often prestigious leadership positions in sport, college coaching, are difficult for women to attain.<sup>76</sup> Women also hold a limited number of other leadership positions in intercollegiate sport, including at the athletic director level in NCAA Division I (11%), Division II (18%) and Division III (31%). Nearly 80% of athletic directors running college sports across all divisions (NCAA Division I, II, and III) are men.<sup>77</sup> Indicative of systemic gender bias that negatively impacts women, Sabo, Veliz, and Staurowsky found that about two-thirds (65%) of current college coaches felt that it was easier for men to get top-level coaching jobs.<sup>78</sup>

Efforts have been made within the Olympic movement to achieve gender equity among athletes, yet women in leadership positions in international sport have not kept pace. Women compose 29% of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) membership.<sup>79</sup> In the United States, Olympic and Paralympic Committee representation of women stands at 37.5% of all members.<sup>80</sup> In the most recent data compiled internally by the Women's Sports Foundation in the summer of 2019, 33% (199 of 594) of the positions available on the boards of U.S. national governing bodies for summer teams were held by



women. Women also held 33% of the positions on U.S. National Governing Bodies (NGBs) for winter sports (39 of 119). Of the 66 “main coaches” for the U.S. team at the 2018 Olympic Winter Games, eight (12.1%) were female, seven of whom coached figure skating or ice dancing. This is a slight increase from the 2014 Games when women held 8.5% of “main coach” positions.<sup>81</sup>

At its most basic, the health of the U.S. sport system can be measured in the way it treats its women workers occupying myriad roles as administrators, athletes, coaches, entrepreneurs, executives, fundraisers, marketers, members of the media, and owners. Although the sport industry has met some major milestones in achieving gender parity – with increasing efforts to diversify the workplace yielding increasing numbers of women hired into top positions within professional sport franchises, national sport governing bodies, and major college conferences – significant hurdles remain.

Most women are not impacted at the penultimate point in their sport career, but instead the barriers and challenges they face cause many to leave at multiple points along their career paths, leading to a reduced pipeline or smaller pool of qualified candidates to draw upon when senior level positions open.<sup>82</sup> The glass ceiling can be evident at multiple stages of a career progression, but it often is perceived as an impenetrable barrier, causing women who have reached this point to select a different career path or field altogether.

The WSF Female Leaders in Sport Survey respondents reported gender bias in the workplace and a gender dynamic that negatively impacted their productivity and employment. An earlier study found that three-quarters (75%) of female college coaches said that men had an easier time negotiating salary increases, more than half (54%) believed that men are more likely to be promoted, to secure a multiyear contract upon hiring (52%), and to be rewarded with salary increases for successful performance (53%).<sup>83</sup> Although progress has been made, women are still a long way from fair compensation and treatment.



**To have equal prize money in the majors sends a message.  
It's not about the money, it's about the message.**

*– Billie Jean King (Miami Herald, 2019)*



**37.5%**

Olympic and Paralympic Committee representation of women (Houghton et al., 2018)

**12.1%**

Main coaches of the U.S. Winter Olympic Team who are women (Houghton et al., 2018)

**33%**

U.S. National Governing Bodies representation of women (Women's Sports Foundation, 2019)

## FEMALE LEADERS IN SPORT SURVEY (2019)

### Gender Bias in the Workplace

Just over half of the women sport leaders surveyed (51%) reported that men were favored over women in their workplace when it came to assessments of job performance.

Sixty-three percent of female sports leaders reported experiencing sex discrimination in the workplace.

For female sports leaders who experienced sex discrimination in the workplace, 70% indicated that the discrimination they faced had a negative or large negative impact on them.

While 38% of women sport leaders reported that the culture in which they work has gotten better over the past 10 years in terms of not requiring conformity to sex stereotypical behaviors, 46% indicated that the culture they work in remains largely unchanged from what it was 10 years ago, and 15% indicated that an insistence on adhering to sex stereotypical behaviors had gotten worse or much worse.

When asked to compare how competent women were perceived in the sport workplace today compared to 10 years ago, 44% indicated that there had been no change, 38% indicated that women's competence was viewed better or much better than 10 years ago, and 17% indicated that perceptions of women's competence in sport workplaces was worse or much worse than 10 years ago.

Women sport leaders report that there has been some improvement in workplace climate around issues related to homophobia (51%), transphobia (25%), racism (37%), religious bias (25%), anti-semitism (25%), ageism (13%) and the treatment of people with disabilities (29%). However, there is much more work to be done in all of these areas.

While there have been pockets of improvement in the workplace climate of women working in sport, women sport leaders report that much of what they face in terms of workplace biases remains largely the same or have gotten worse over the past 10 years. A strong minority of female leaders report that homophobic (35%) and racist attitudes (44%) in their workplaces have not changed while 14% and 19% of women sport leaders report that homophobia and racism, respectively, has gotten worse or much worse in their workplaces.

Perspectives that seem to have changed the least during the past 10 years in the places where women sport leaders work include treatment for people with disabilities (64%); religious bias (63%); anti-semitism (65%); ageism (58%); and transphobia (51%).

1971 90%  
2016 43%

The decline of female head coaches in women's college sports (Sabo, Veliz, & Staurowsky, 2016)

24%

The percent of all head coaches at the college level who are women (NCAA Race & Gender Demographics, 2019a)

20%

The percent of women serving as athletic directors in the NCAA (NCAA Race & Gender Demographics, 2019a)

31%

The percent of female coaches who believe that they would risk their job if they spoke up about Title IX and gender equity. (Sabo, Veliz, & Staurowsky, 2016)





# 10

## Under the Radar: Fair Media Coverage Remains Illusive

One of the longstanding trends in the research on gender, sport, and media is the underrepresentation of women's sports and the objectification and trivialization of sportswomen in media.<sup>84, 85</sup> With minor exceptions during international competitive events (what scholars term "sports mega-events") such as the FIFA World Cup<sup>86, 87</sup> and the Olympic Games,<sup>88, 89, 90</sup> as well as local news<sup>91</sup> or niche media outlets,<sup>92</sup> the vast majority of sport media coverage centers on men's sports.<sup>93, 94, 95, 96, 97, 98, 99</sup>

Longitudinal research examining the coverage of men's and women's sports on televised news and highlight shows has found that the coverage of women's sports has actually declined over the 25-year time period (1989–2014) with only 3.2% of coverage devoted to women's sports in 2014.<sup>100</sup> According to that same study, ESPN's SportsCenter devoted 1.3–2.2% of its coverage to women's sports during a 15-year time period (1999–2014). Recent research examining online and social media also indicate similar trends in coverage, with the majority of content devoted to male athletes and men's sports. For example, a recent study examined 1,587 Instagram images from the primary accounts of the four major American sports networks and found women's coverage lags significantly behind men's. The researchers also noted how sportswomen are more likely to appear alongside their male counterparts in culturally "appropriate" sports and in nonathletic roles.<sup>101</sup> Sports media coverage often minimizes sportswomen's athleticism<sup>102</sup> and represents women and female athletes as sexual objects.<sup>103, 104, 105</sup> Moreover, men's sports are often produced in more visually exciting ways through the use of more camera angles, diversity of shot types, and the use of graphics and special effects.<sup>106, 107</sup>

3.2%

The percent of sports media coverage devoted to women's sports. (Cooky, Messner, and Musto, 2015)

17.9%

The representation of women on the staffs of Associated Press Sports Editors (APSE) member newspapers. (Lapchick, Bloom et al., 2018)

1.12 billion

Worldwide, a record 1.12 billion viewers tuned into the 2019 Women's World Cup. (Glass, 2019)

Studies increasingly include an intersectional perspective offering nuanced understandings of how coverage and representation of sportswomen is shaped by racial identities and other social locations. For example, media portrayals of elite athletes with disabilities reflect similar patterns in terms of less coverage being devoted to female athletes, so, due to the negligible coverage of athletes with disabilities in general, female athletes with disabilities are rendered nearly invisible by the press.<sup>108</sup> Scholars have noted hypersexual racialized portrayals of sportswomen of color,<sup>109, 110</sup> and sportswomen of color competing in the Olympics were more likely to experience racist and sexist microaggressions in the media when compared to their White counterparts.<sup>111</sup>

There are a number of factors to explain the above trends in the coverage of women's sports. Certainly, hegemonic masculinity embedded in sports and sport cultures, as well as sexism, play a role.<sup>112, 113</sup> In addition, scholars and women's sports advocates have suggested the lack of women in journalist, broadcaster, and commentator roles in sports media as well as the lack of women in decision-making positions or leadership positions within sports media may help to explain the continued dominance of coverage of men's sports.<sup>114, 115</sup> According to a recent report, the 75 newspapers and websites examined all received an F for gender hiring practices. The report found 90% of sports editors, 69.9% of sports assistant sports editors, 83.4% of columnists, 88.5% of reporters, and 79.6% of copy editors/designers were men (and the vast majority, White men).<sup>116</sup>

Simply hiring women may not sufficiently address the problem given that once women are hired, they often leave the industry in what's been termed a "revolving door" in sports journalism. This may be in part due to the working cultures of sports media outlets, which still tend to be masculine-identified (regardless of the numerical proportions of women and men employees) as well as the harassment women in sports media professions encounter.<sup>117</sup> Without fair media coverage, women's sports role models are invisible and girls and women may conclude that there is little cultural value assigned to their participation in sport.

A soccer ball is positioned in the bottom left corner of the page, resting on a vibrant green grass field. The ball is white with black hexagonal panels. The background is a soft-focus green field, suggesting an outdoor sports setting.

**Media plays a big role in how we see sports and who we value in sports. If female athletes are seen and respected, more will want to be part of a team, learn a sport or even consider sports writing, etc.**

*– Respondent, Female Leaders in Sport Survey*

# Conclusion

As we approach the 50th anniversary of Title IX's passage, there is no better time for girls and women to participate and work in sport in the United States. The triumphs of U.S. women athletes around the world who represent the very best of what the nation has to offer provide tangible proof of the heights to which women can achieve when afforded equitable access to opportunity and the very real impact those women's achievements have on the aspirations of future generations. Progress, however, cannot be met with complacency because the data is clear. For all of the progress that has been made in advancing the interests of girls and women in the U.S. sport system, women athletes and women sport leaders are still confronted with challenges that impede their full and fair access to play, compete, and work; that contribute to work and play environments that are unwelcoming; and that leave girls and women too often chasing equity. This report does not present merely a statement of problems, but also provides readily implementable and accessible calls to action that athletes, citizens, coaches, change makers, game changers, members of the media, parents, public policy makers, and sport executives can adopt and move forward so that we can get beyond girls and women in sport chasing equity to simply chasing their dreams.



# Calls to Action

There is much that can be done to address the myriad issues identified in this report. The following are calls to action that can be taken up by athletes, citizens, coaches, change makers, game changers, members of the media, parents, public policy makers, and sport executives to increase and improve sport participation opportunities for girls and women; to break down barriers that prevent girls and women from participating fully in sport, especially girls and women from marginalized groups; to improve and enhance Title IX compliance at the high school and college levels; to address equal treatment in sport workplaces and continue to promote women in sport leadership roles; and to increase media coverage of women's sport.

## Participation

1. Improve efforts to monitor youth, high school, college, and elite sport in the United States so that participation across all demographics can be systematically captured and evaluated.
2. Find new and creative ways to promote opportunities for girls to participate in a wide variety of sports, including non-traditional sport pathways, to encourage more adolescent girls to participate, regardless of their ability level or interest level in traditionally offered sport.
3. Innovate and provide new opportunities for girls to participate in sport and physical activity at the high school level for broader and more sustained participation. Encourage girls to participate in multiple sports at the high school level to maximize health benefits and reduce injury and burn-out.<sup>118</sup>
4. Develop opportunities for girls to participate in mixed-sex teams and work on policies to ensure positive participation environments to support girls and boys, and women and men, as they learn to play and compete together.
5. Encourage governing bodies to continuously evaluate state-by-state sport trends to understand their climate and provide opportunities for their specific population of sport participants to compete in high school and recreational sport.
6. Implement educational programs for young women on the lifelong benefits of participation in sport and physical activity, including decreased risk of cardiovascular disease and cancer.
7. Educate parents on the benefits of encouraging their daughters to participate in physical activity and sport. Encourage participation in sport at an early age to take full advantage of developmental factors associated with sport participation. Stress the importance of sport participation during the ages of and surrounding puberty, as girls' bodies, minds, and social support systems will likely shift during this time. Educate parents and caregivers about how they can support their daughter's' sport participation.
8. Emphasize team building and inclusion when creating and strengthening girls' sport experiences while simultaneously remaining focused on the fitness benefits of sport. Organize activities with both fitness and sociability in mind in order to increase girls' motivation for participating in school sport specifically.
9. Expand research on the use of sport as a tool to combat depressive symptoms and psychological distress.
10. Educate girls on the synergy between sport participation and academic pursuits and how both can provide them opportunities in the future. Support girls' academic pursuits by teaching time management skills and supporting balanced relationships with both athletics and academics.

## Barriers

11. Fund, support, and implement research to identify the barriers to sports participation and physical activity across different communities and populations and how to overcome them. Once barriers and solutions are identified, establish programs to execute strategic solutions. This should include research that looks at multiple factors impacting sports participation and uses advanced research methods and data to better understand the systems involved.
12. Foster a supportive climate for girls from marginalized groups by creating a welcoming, safe, and inclusive environment through policy and practice.
13. Prioritize coach background checks, qualifications, and education in youth sport organizations. For instance, U.S. Soccer offers both in-person and online youth coaching clinics (The Aspen Institute, 2018). Other sport organizations should follow the same formula, making education and training convenient for coaches to aid in completion.
14. Implement mandatory education and training of all coaches regarding emotional and physical abuse and appropriate motivation techniques. Enforce a zero-tolerance policy for coaches emotionally and/or physically abusing athletes. Include specific language in coaching contracts that prohibits abusive behaviors and that states any type of abuse is grounds for termination with cause.
15. Develop policies to protect athletes from sexual harassment and abuse. Create entry-level training and mentoring programs for novice coaches. Encourage parents to be present at the sporting experiences of their children and ensure they have access to all spaces where their child is participating. Coaches or athletic personnel should not initiate contact with or accept supervisory responsibility for athletes' outside club programs and activities. Coaches and other athletic personnel should not be alone with athletes.



16. Educate athletes, coaches, and athletic personnel about the importance of mental health. Discuss the signs and symptoms of mental health disorders and where to find support. Conduct a pre-participation mental health screening every year to assess the athlete's mental health and well-being. Have clinical psychologists on call to help diagnose and support athletes who may be suffering from a mental health ailment. Destigmatize mental health disorders by inviting former athletes to speak about their challenges with mental health.

17. Ensure effective protocols are in place to protect athletes from injury. Require pre-participation assessment or physical for all athletes. The doctor will be able to check for any underlying conditions that may be present that could be exacerbated by athletic participation. An athletic trainer or medical personnel must be present at all team activities. Provide accurate and concise information on injury reports of athletes. Ensure all athletes are in proper athletic apparel and equipment to reduce the risk of injury from faulty or lack of equipment. Once an athlete is medically cleared and allowed to return to play, a stepwise protocol should be followed to ease the athlete back into the sport. The athletic trainer or medical professional must continue to monitor the athlete to ensure the symptoms or side effects of the injury do not return.

18. Increase education for coaches, athletic administrators, and athletes to understand the importance of concussion prevention and treatment. Require pre-participation assessment for all athletes to establish a baseline measurement. This should be used if a concussion is obtained to help decide when an athlete can return to their sport participation. Any player who suffers a hit to the head should be removed from competition for the duration of the event to assess for concussion symptoms. If the hit to the head occurs in practice, the athlete should not be allowed to return to practice for at least 24 hours. Require a healthcare professional to approve the athlete's return to play if a concussion has occurred. Once an athlete is medically cleared and allowed to return to play, a stepwise protocol should be followed to ease the athlete back into the sport. The athletic trainer or medical professional must continue to monitor the athlete to ensure the symptoms or side effects of the concussion do not return.



## Title IX

19. Improve monitoring to ensure that all school districts, universities, and colleges that receive federal funding designate an employee to serve as Title IX coordinator. They must make the Title IX coordinator's identity and contact information easy to find by students, personnel, and members of the public. The OCR should continue to enforce the law's Title IX coordinator requirement through investigations, resolutions, and, where necessary, adjudication.

20. Ensure that Title IX coordinators are trained in Title IX requirements and implementation strategies. State education agencies and state athletic associations should ensure that training is available and financially accessible to school district personnel serving in Title IX coordinator roles. While the best practice for most institutions is to structure the Title IX coordinator's position external to athletics, the Title IX coordinator should work closely with athletic department staff to ensure that athletics gender equity issues are not overlooked by an institution that is also addressing other challenging Title IX issues, such as sexual misconduct. It may be helpful for a Title IX coordinator to designate deputy coordinators or other Title IX liaisons within the athletic department to facilitate necessary trainings and to ensure effective communication and reporting. Institution-wide committees that monitor and support the institution's Title IX compliance should ensure that gender equity in athletics is included on the committee's agenda or else designate a specific athletics-related subcommittee to address that issue.

21. Develop a reporting system that requires schools to publicly disclose a) which part of Title IX's three-part test for athletic participation they are using to comply, b) information regarding their history and continuing practice of program expansion, and c) the methods used to fully and effectively meet the needs and interests of qualified female athletes. Work towards high school public disclosure reports in every state to provide better data about what is happening at the high school level relative to the allocation of athletic opportunities and resources.

22. In order to motivate institutional compliance, the NCAA and other athletic associations should monitor Title IX compliance as a condition for membership, reviving its past practice of self-study and peer review. Similarly, state athletic associations and/or state education agencies should provide compliance oversight as well.

23. Urge sport governing bodies to consider adopting, as a standard of membership, meeting a gender equity standard or providing certification of Title IX compliance. Conduct Title IX athletic education seminars at media association events. Require sport organizations to have a Title IX or gender equity assessment by a third party every 3-5 years.





**An enormous percentage of female athletes I've spoken with have had that one person who told them they could do it at a young age.**

*– Respondent, Female Leaders in Sport Survey*



## Women in Sport Leadership

24. The United States Olympic and Paralympic Committee and NGBs should act immediately to endorse the March 25, 2018, IOC Gender Equality Recommendations and produce analogous plans, timetables, and monitoring systems for their own organizations to achieve all recommendations.

25. Support professional sport league expansion to create more opportunities for women to participate in professional sport.

26. Reduce gender bias and discrimination in the workplace with deliberate strategies to address each. Evaluate role definitions and position descriptions to identify gender markers and identifiers. Expand role definitions and position descriptions to eliminate gender bias. Evaluate promotion practices to identify attributes more commonly aligned with one gender. Create hiring committees with diverse representation.

27. Evaluate hiring practices at the collegiate level to ensure equitable opportunities for women. Recruit gender diverse pools of applicants for open positions developed by administrators and search committee members who are diverse themselves, knowledgeable in recognizing the subtleties of discrimination, and committed to overcoming it. Standardize human resources policies and procedures to ensure neutral outcomes with regard to gender, race/ethnicity, disability, and LGBTQ status. Educate hiring committee members on inclusive practices and overcoming implicit bias.

28. Identify barriers to and opportunities for career advancement for women in sport. Create mentoring programs that build in opportunities for women to learn from seasoned professionals and grow through mastering new challenges. Identify male allies who have the power to help women advance and change the status quo. Financially support professional development opportunities for women. Identify policies impacting parents and those who have caretaker responsibilities. Generate new ideas to create a workplace supportive of families and employee well-being. Eliminate practices of reliance on networks that limit inclusion of women and diverse colleagues. Create career plans with employees to achieve metrics for consistent growth and advancement opportunities.



## Media Coverage

29. Commit to consistent media coverage of women's sports. While covering women's sports during sports mega-events is important, to build and sustain audiences and fan bases, sports media need to cover women's sports on an everyday basis. This allows readers and fans to build anticipation, understand strategies, and know players and teams. Focusing on lesser-known stories and backstories helps build and sustain a loyal fan base (Adapted from Springer, 2019).<sup>119</sup>

30. Improve the quality of women's sports coverage to mirror the coverage of men's sports. This requires moving beyond conventional narratives of female athletes and delving into complex understandings and nuanced narratives that reject gender stereotypes and roles (e.g., female athlete as "girl next door," mother balancing work and child-rearing, or object of men's sexual desire). Frame ideas and questions that are athlete-driven rather than gender-driven, in order to avoid some of the issues that often plague women's sports coverage, like femininity, attractiveness, and biology (Adapted from Springer, 2019).

31. Hire, develop and retain more women in sports media. Hire and retain on-camera sports anchors that are capable and willing to commit to gender-equitable quality and quantity of coverage. Hiring and retention decisions should prioritize anchors and analysts—women and men—who are knowledgeable about and love women's sports. It is unlikely that one can easily or effectively fake the sort of enthusiasm today's male commentators routinely show for men's sports and male athletes' accomplishments. (Adapted from Cooky, Messner, & Musto, 2015)









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