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The Ethics of the Discrepancy of Participation, Funding, and Exposure
for Women in College Athletics

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Table of Contents

1. Abstract

2. Introduction

3. History of Women in College Athletics

a. Title IX

4. Current State of College Athletics

 a. Governance Structure

 b. Participation

c. Allocation of Funds

d. Distribution of Revenue

e. Exposure

 i. Broadcasting of College Athletics

 ii. Sponsorship of College Athletics

 iii. Expansion of Women in Professional Sports

5. Values-based View of the Current State of College Athletics

 a. Catholic Views on Women

 b. Ethical Concerns

6. Conclusion

7. References

**Abstract**

This paper examines the ethical dilemma of the discrepancy in participation, funding and exposure for women in college athletics. It examines the history and current state of college athletics to form a base understanding, as well as a brief explanation of Title IX and its importance in gender discrimination. Upon detailing the current state of college athletics, a values-based view indicates there is still quite a bit of work to do as we work towards full equality.

 Athletics is a field that I have been fascinated by as long as I can remember. Both of my parents grew up playing sports and in households where sports played a great role in their lives. My maternal grandfather played college basketball and refereed for many years before teaching my mom how to play, too. My father grew up as an avid football and baseball fan, and he participated in athletics throughout high school. Throughout my childhood, my family was extremely immersed in athletics. I played basketball and softball, my sister played basketball and softball and ran cross country in high school, and my brother played soccer and ran cross country and freshman football in high school.

 I was also raised in a family that has strong Catholic values and traditions. Whether we were home or away at a tournament for the weekend, my mom always found a way to attend Sunday mass. She also balanced her career with successfully getting us to our weekly CCD meetings; even teaching, and eventually running, the Tuesday program that was designated for first through fifth graders for several years. My identity was further formed while attending a Jesuit high school prior to committing to DeSales University. In short, my Catholic identity and the teachings of the Catholic Church have played a large role in developing my values and the grounds on which my ethical decisions are made. Because of the foundation I received from my upbringing and my academic and athletic experiences at DeSales, I furthered my understanding of NCAA athletics and more specifically the experience of women in a similar position.

 Women in college athletics have experienced a long and difficult history in order to reach the point the women are at today. Laws and regulations that have promoted equal opportunities for women have evolved over the last 50 years, but there is still room for improvement. With revenue drivers such as the television deal for the Men’s Basketball Championship tournament (March Madness) and the FBS’s College Football Playoff National Championship, college athletics has been able to bring in upward of billions of dollars annually. In the period between September 2016 and August 2017, the NCAA was able to produce $1.06 billion in revenue, the highest it has ever seen (Rovell, 2018). Despite the advancements, improvements, and additional opportunities within women’s college athletics, the gap in the allocation of funds and exposure for females in college athletics still has much room for improvement.

**History of Women in College Athletics**

The history of women in college athletics highlights the continual struggle that women in college athletics still face today. It was a long and arduous process to reach where we are today and for women to be granted the more opportunities for exposure and funding. It was through the efforts of early female physical educators and women’s governance structures that women began to attempt to reach equality with the men.

 The women’s rights movements of the late 1800’s to the early 1900’s was one of the major starting points for the integration of women in intercollegiate athletics. At this point in United States history, women were not attending college at rates similar to men. College attendance for women challenged the traditional gender stereotypes of females in the household and provided many challenges for women who wanted to receive an education, never mind compete in athletics. After the World War II, more women were attending college than ever, and this provided a great opportunity at the collegiate level to incorporate physical education into the curriculum and eventually to the degree of competitiveness as the men. Women physical educators provided the necessary information to the leaders of the colleges on how to properly train the women and how exercise provides health benefits that help with both the stress of education and the overall well-being for women as well.

 The women had also successfully participated in the All-American Girls Baseball League throughout the war in order to sustain the revenue for the baseball team’s owners while their players were fighting in the war. This surge in athletic participation for women encouraged women to continue with athletics, and the women’s suffrage movements in the United States in the post-World War II era allowed women to continue this feat. Women had a new sense of “self-esteem and self-confidence” that allowed women to think “that if they could compete successfully in the workforce, then they could successfully compete on the athletic fields” (Bell, 2016). It was actions and events such as these that gave women the drive and determination to increase their exposure, participation, and opportunities in athletics.

 Once programs were established at the college level for women, they had to face the issues of leadership and find instructors who had knowledge in physical education. Those who supervised female physical activities were often only qualified in the medical profession and limited the women to “emphasize hygiene, health, and ‘vigorous womanhood’” (Wushanley, 2004). It was not until women physical educators emerged and accepted their instructive roles that women began to shatter the “Victorian values of the ‘frailer sex’” and were introduced to what the educators “determined for them ‘appropriate’ sport behavior and ‘acceptable’ values” as females breaking the stereotypical barrier (Wushanley, 2004).

As the desire to participate in physical education grew and individual abilities improved, the students wanted to compete more. Physical educators provided students with the framework to be more competitive with each other. Competition in sport began as student-run activities. They competed amongst students enrolled at their institution, similar to intramurals that are run on college campuses today. As the men’s competition improved and expanded to matches against other schools, the women continued to compete against members of their own institution. This expansion from the men highlighted some of the first examples of the discrepancy of exposure for females in college athletics.

 Basketball was the first sport in which women began to have some control and increase exposure and competition. In 1899, female educators formed the Women’s Basketball Committee to help expand the game and make that area of college athletics their own (Wushanley, 2004). As previously mentioned, the female educators continued their roles as previously mentioned in the early years of intercollegiate athletics, and they learned from the concerns and flaws that were most obvious from men’s athletics to create an environment for success and growth.

 Women’s track and field team was the first female inclusion in the 1922 Olympic Games in Paris, France. The men who took charge of this event for the women attempted to incorporate their emphasis on winning and dominance, which the women attempted to discourage because physical activity should be about more than just winning but about the pride in accomplishment and the impact it had on the growth of women’s athletics. It was through the efforts of Mrs. Lou Henry Hoover, future president Herbert Hoover’s wife, as “president of the Girl Scouts and a vice president of the National Amateur Athletic Federation (NAAF)” to help keep the differences between male and female competition distinct and unique to each gender (Wushanley, 2004).

 As the years progressed, the women continued to conduct their own athletic competitions and increase female participation in collegiate athletics. Then, when World War II began, women were required to take on more traditionally masculine roles, such as driving fire engines or working in the metal and shipbuilding industries. Most relevant for the purpose of this paper, females were included in the physical education classes and opportunities as that of their male counterparts because of the increased demand for physically capable bodies. The various branches of government provided an increase in funding in order to better prepare the college-aged students to serve their country.

 Similarly, another point that led to the increased involvement of women in athletics was the Cold War. It was during this time that the Americans began to recognize that not only were the Soviet men catching up and even surpassing American men in physical and athletic competitions, but the Soviet women were drastically out-performing the American women as well. The United States were in a state of constantly wanting to compete and defeat the Soviet Union, so they began training the males even harder and increased female participation but with a greater emphasis on competition and winning.

 Early governing structures came in response to the growth of college athletics and the need for rules and regulations that evolved to some of the most important and enforced rules today. The first structure formed was the Intercollegiate Athletic Association of the United States (IAAUS) in 1906 and included 62 members to oversee the inclusion of these newly established rules. By 1910, the IAAUS became the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), and it continued to govern college athletics, and by 1921 it introduced the first national championship for men’s track and field (Hums & MacLean, 2013).

The struggle to govern women athletics became more prevalent because of the existing governance structures in men’s athletics, and so educators and early leaders in women’s athletics introduced the governance structure known as the Association for Intercollegiate Athletics for Women (AIAW) which was established in 1971 by women physical educators. “The initial mission of the AIAW was to further women’s intercollegiate athletics through: (1) fostering broad programs consistent with educational objectives, (2) assisting member institutions in program extension and enrichment, (3) stimulating the development of quality leadership, and (4) encouraging excellence in performance” (Wushanley, 2004).

One of the AIAW’s main objectives was to provide the equal opportunity for women and their chance to compete in championships, especially in competitions that were not already sponsored by other governing bodies. This body also helped to eliminate the presence of the “win at all costs” attitude that was seen amongst NCAA member institutions, and it helped to foster a positive environment for women to enhance their skills and abilities without enforcing the ideas of dominance. The AIAW provided a great example for organization’s and other entities advancing women’s college athletics and increasing their opportunities, especially in its earliest stages.

Ultimately, the AIAW dissolved in 1982 as Title IX was enforced and institutions were unwilling to deal with separate governing bodies for men’s and women’s sport. The NCAA announced that it would be more inclusive and accommodating for women’s athletics and proposed the following measures to help preserve what the AIAW had worked to establish for female athletes:

“The NCAA offered to: (a) pay all expenses for teams competing in a national championship, (b) charge no additional membership fees for schools to add women’s programs, (c) create financial aid, recruitment, and eligibility rules that were the same for women as for men, and finally, (d) guarantee women more television coverage” (Bell, 2019).

The dissolution of the AIAW allowed these propositions by the NCAA to be carried out after the years of hard work and dedication by the AIAW to get women’s athletics to that point in time. Women would soon begin to see an increase in opportunities and exposure. Title IX was beginning to impact college athletics, but there was still some resistance from college administrators of the time.

**Title IX**

 Title IX was created to help provide equal opportunities and eliminate situations of discrimination based on sex in educational settings. The law, passed in 1972, states:

 “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” (Office for Civil Rights, 2018).

 The scope of Title IX applies to institutions that receive federal aid. Some of the key areas where Title IX applies most often in cases that relate to “recruitment, admissions, and counseling; financial assistance; athletics; sex-based harassment; ... discipline; ... and employment” (Office for Civil Rights, 2018).

The three prongs of Title IX in intercollegiate athletics includes the proportionality, continuous expansion, and accommodations for the underrepresented sex. The proportionality tests determine if the male and female athletes is representative of the enrollment numbers at their institution. The second prong aims to establish that institutions are providing opportunities that reflect the growing needs and desires of the underrepresented sex. Lastly, the third prong states that the institution provide equal opportunities in terms of interest for the underrepresented sex.

It is important to understand the prongs of Title IX because it addressed the resistance to equity and gender discrimination. While many argue that Title IX is harming college athletics because it forces institutions to eliminate men’s programs to comply with Title IX, they fail to recognize that this legislation protects men and women, whichever is the underrepresented sex at the institution, and that men are typically the administrators at the collegiate level when men’s programs are cut. The proportionality, continuous expansion, and accommodations for the underrepresented sex prongs are all in place to allow equal opportunities for all.

**Current State of College Athletics**

**Governance Structure**

The NCAA is currently broken down into the three divisions (Division I, Division II, and Division III). In order to maintain status in one of the divisions, institutions must meet several requirements and sponsor a specific number of championships in its member conferences. Division I institutions must sponsor seven sports for men and seven for women, Division II institutions must sponsor at least five sports for men and five for women, and Division III institutions must sponsor at least five sports for men and five for women (Divisional Differences, 2013). All must also meet a minimum number of games played in each respective sport, and sponsor a minimum number of championships.

**Participation**

 The number of participants and opportunities to compete and become involved in college athletes continues to grow every year. For the 2017-2018 academic year in Division I, a new high of 494,992 student-athletes competed in NCAA championship sports, jumping by an additional 3,000 from the 2016-2017 academic year (Schwarb, 2018). According to the NCAA website, there were 216,378 female student-athletes (44%) compared to 278,614 male student-athletes (56%) nationwide, but there is a somewhat more equal distribution of 53% men to 47% women in Division I athletics, which is the focus of this essay. These facts do not align with the statistics that show females make up 57% of the undergraduate students on college campuses, making the idea of Title IX and equality based on sex less important (Zimbalist, 2017). The difference in the ratio of participation in athletics to enrollment also fails to accurately align with the proportionality prong of Title IX.

 When broken down by sport participation, Division I football dominates the numbers drastically at 29,092 participants between the FBS and FCS during the 2018 season (2019). This number often skews the participation numbers because there is no female equivalent to help institutions remain in compliance with Title IX. Basketball men (5,537) edge out the women (5,059). Baseball and softball have a slightly larger gap, with participation in baseball at 10,601 and softball at 6,394 (NCAA Database, 2019). Other notable sports include soccer women (9,380) outweighing men (6,011) and lacrosse women (3,649) outweighing the men (3,410) (NCAA Database, 2019).

 Some of the major discrepancies are in part due to the demands of roster sizes. Football typically averages a roster size of 114.3, due in part to the number of players that take the field for each snap (NCAA Database, 2019). Often times in baseball, pitchers will not make plate appearances, so teams will use designated hitters and are more conscious of their pitch counts, whereas in softball pitchers will hit for themselves and do not have similar limitations on their innings pitched or their pitch count.

 Other unbalanced participation situations are representative of the manner in which society has allowed the youth of today to perceive specific sports. For example, women’s volleyball is largely more popular in the United States than men’s volleyball. The number of men playing volleyball in 2018 jumped by 13 from 2017 to demonstrate that the sport is growing, but still has room for improvement. Men’s volleyball is growing at an alarmingly slow rate, and that could be due largely to volleyball being perceived as a women’s sport.

**Allocation of Funds**

 No events better highlight the discrepancy of revenue allocation than the Division I men’s and women’s basketball tournaments. The men’s tournament, while more popular, is highly exposed, and a portion of the revenue earned from this tournament is distributed to the participating teams’ conferences based on total number of games played across a six-year span, just based on one year of participation in the tournament (Zimbalist, 2017).

The women on the other hand, receive minimal funds for their participation in the Division I national championship tournament. In the revenue distribution for college’s athletic departments, the revenue earned from the women’s tournament becomes part of the “basketball fund” and is evenly distributed across Division I institutions that sponsor men’s and women’s basketball programs. While their television contract and revenue are not as high as the men’s, the women’s programs overall still produce revenue in ticket sales along with their annual television contract. For example, in the 2016-2017 season, Stanford’s women’s basketball program totaled $21,440,365 in revenue and its entire athletic department’s total revenue for that year was $125,039,558, and the University of Connecticut’s (UConn) program produced $9,032,881 of the department’s total $83,374,163 (McClung, 2018). Women’s basketball puts in the same time, energy, and effort as men’s basketball, but receive significantly less compensation.

Berri addresses the common assumption that the introduction and enforcement of Title IX drastically impacted college athletics at the expense of the male athletes. When a men’s sports program gets cut from an institution at any level (Division I, II, or III), the public is quick to assume that it is Title IX and the women’s fault. These individuals are only familiar with the first prong of Title IX, the “proportionality test,” and fail to recognize that even by cutting some of these programs, the women are still underrepresented in athletics at their institution (Berri, 2018).

Berri’s article highlights some of the literature and research to support his claim that men’s sports are not directly being affected by women’s sports. The budgets and finance of the situation is often a larger reason behind cutting a program or making changes within an athletic department than making sure an institution is truly in alignment with Title IX. While the other two tests of Title IX are harder for the public to understand or measure, the proportionality test is often scrutinized as being the unfair aspect that causes men’s athletics to suffer on behalf of the women. The cause of some of these cuts, according to the article, is actually so that the institution can remove low-revenue teams, such as wrestling, and use their required budget to help support the high-revenue teams, such as football and men’s basketball (Berri, 2018). So, the growth of women’s sport is not at the cost of the men; rather, it is the men who cost the men. This article not only highlights the growing popularity of women’s college athletics, but it also shows that some men’s sports struggle and that Title IX is not always the scapegoat for the gender issues in collegiate athletics.

**Distribution of Revenue**

Figure 1: 2019 Revenue Distribution (2019)

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Figure 2: 2019 Revenue Distribution Plan (2019)



According to the NCAA Division I Revenue Distribution Plan, the current allocation of the funds is distributed in several ways. The following funds receive distribution from the revenue of NCAA Division I efforts: academic enhancement fund, academic performance fund, basketball performance fund, broad-based which includes sports sponsorship and grants in-aid, conference grants, equal conference fund, special assistance fund, and student-athlete opportunity fund. Of these funds, academic enhancement, conference grants, and student assistance need to be reported by the respective institutions in advance in order to become a part of the overall distribution plan set at the beginning of the year. When a member institution is set to receive funds from the NCAA, the funds are either distributed directly to the individual institution or to the institution’s conference.

The Academic Enhancement funds’ main goal is to help aid student-athletes in their academic endeavors. Divided equally among Division I programs, the academic enhancement fund is acceptable for use in areas such as summer school, tutoring, academic support services, other academic and programming expenses, and much more. This is especially needed at the Division I level because many Division I programs require that their student athletes complete summer sessions so that they can receive academic credit during an off-season because the demands of their sport’s season do not always allow the students the same luxuries and conveniences that traditional undergraduate students have.

The academic performance fund, which is described in the 2019 report, is expected to begin in the year 2020. The distribution of this fund will be based on the performances of the student-athletes at each member institution. To qualify for this fund, one of the three requirements must be made by the institution. The three requirements are: “Institutions NCAA Division I APR for the previous year is equal to or greater than 985; institutions GSR for the most recently available year is equal to or greater than 90 percent; or difference between the institution’s student-athlete and student-body rates for the most recently published FGR is greater than or equal to 13 percentage points” (Distribution Plan, 2019).

The distribution of the basketball performance fund is based on each individual Division I program’s performance in the men’s national championship tournament. Rather than a one-year distribution plan, this fund distributes on a six-year deal, all based on the advancement of each team in a given year’s tournament. This fund, similar to many other of the funds outlined in the distribution plan, is distributed to the member institution’s conference and then allocated responsibly from there with an appropriate clause included if a team leaves their conference at any given point.

Broad-based distributions are broken down into two specific categories: the sports sponsorship fund and the grants-in aid fund. The sports sponsorship fund is based on the number of varsity programs the institution sponsors, starting after the 14th program which is the minimum requirement to maintain Division I athletic status. It is also limited to teams that consistently compete in championships and emerging sports for female athletes. The grants in-aid fund is based on the amount of athletic grants each institution offers to its students, while also offering a multiplier beyond an established amount of athletic grants given by an institution.

 Conference Grants apply to conferences at the Division I level that maintain both men’s and women’s basketball programs that can automatically qualify for the national championship. The grants distributed to the conferences are to be used in the following ways: “improvement of men’s and women’s officiating programs in all sports; enhancement of conference compliance and enforcement programs; heightening the awareness of athletics staff and student-athletes to programs associated with drug use, and assisting coaches, athletics administrators and student-athletes in this regard; enhancement of opportunities…; development of conference sports wagering education programs; enhance diversity and inclusion efforts; and enhance health and safety of student-athletes, coaches and administrators (including mental health)” (Distribution Plan, 2019). Despite a few limitations and restrictions, the conference administrators are allowed a fair amount of flexibility in the distribution of the funds because of the varying nature of conference structures. Lastly in accordance with the conference grants, the conferences report on areas such as officiating (men and women), sports wagering and compliance, drug education, as well as enhancement for several categories.

 Similarly, the equal conference fund applies to basketball playing conferences, and it is determined by “units earned” within a certain five-year period. Whereas the other funds have multiple criteria or limitations to the grant, the equal conference fund is pretty straight forward.

 Lastly, the student assistance fund (SAF) is split between the special assistance fund and the student-athlete opportunity fund. In order to determine the allocation according to the following statement: “the SAF shall be used to assist student-athletes in meeting financial needs that arise in conjunction with participation in intercollegiate athletics, enrollment in an academic curriculum or to recognize academic achievement as determined by conference offices” (Distribution Plan, 2019). Additionally, these funds cannot be granted prior to the financial aid package that the student-athlete will receive from the institution. The distribution report also stressed that this fund could only be given to students and their financial aid needs rather than any salaries, benefits, or the like. As seen with other funds, the SAF is determined by the individual conferences rather than the overarching Division I Board of Directors, and it is based on the institutions meeting the minimum requirement of sports sponsored to maintain Division I standings.

The Special Assistance Fund can be broken down and calculated according to three components: “Prior academic year number of Pell grants by institution; prior academic year number of grants in-aid equivalencies by institution; prior academic year number of sports sponsored by institution” (Distribution Plan, 2019). The Student-Athlete Opportunity Fund takes into consideration the Committee on Infractions fines and “is calculated using the proportion of ‘broad-based’ distributions” (Distribution Plan, 2019). It is also broken down into a two-thirds allocation based on grants in-aid and one-third based on sport sponsorship.

 These funds are significant for women’s athletics for several reasons. Specifically, institutions that show increasing advancements for women’s sports from year to year are rewarded with broad-based distribution funds. It encourages institutions to promote their women’s athletics and attempt to close the gender gap in athletics. The funds are also important because they provide the teams with the financial means necessary to maintain their programs and remain competitive as their sport grows.

 The allocation of these funds, however, is concerning. The facts presented in Zimbalist’s 2017 article indicate that women’s programs in college athletics receive significantly less funding in areas such as travel (31.6%), recruiting (29.1%), equipment (21.6%), and overall expenses (16%). These are some significant gaps in the funding for women’s athletics, especially considering the continuous fight for gender equality in all aspects of society.

**Exposure**

**Broadcasting of College Athletics.** The participation numbers provided above are evidence that the participation of and opportunities for women in college athletics has increased. The exposure, however, has not. The uneven distribution can be seen just by viewing ESPN’s homepage during the NCAA Division I March Madness tournament, which is arguably one of the most obvious examples of the discrepancy in exposure for women in college athletics. I visited the site to view the scores and game times for the women’s sweet sixteen games and had to scroll past the men’s tournament highlights and several other sports to almost the bottom of the page for their headlines. ESPN has the television contract for the women’s championship tournament, yet they only broadcast games in a “whip around” style, meaning that they will broadcast a game until one team starts pulling away from the other rather than spreading the games across all of ESPN’s stations.

The women’s tournament is strictly limited to ESPN, ESPN2, and ESPNU, but these channels are often covering one of the many other sporting events that also happen throughout the duration of the women’s championship tournament. This also limits the women’s exposure in that ESPN has to decide as to which teams will get slots on cable as opposed to their app or streaming service. However, many viewers do not have those outlets.

On the other hand, there are minimal limitations in the men’s broadcasting. The men’s tournament is technically limited to CBS and Turner Sports, but that constitutes four stations on which viewers can theoretically watch four games at once and never have to guess what game will be playing. During this year’s tournament, the only complication I had in watching a men’s tournament game was downloading an extra app on my smart television. Each and every men’s team gets an equal opportunity to be seen on television during their time in the single-elimination tournament, so why are the women not granted the same courtesy or opportunity?

Similarly, Sports Illustrated has minimal exposure to the women’s tournament. The day after the women’s final four games, the only exposure the women received was a singular picture for a singular article. The remainder of the home page was dedicated to men’s sports, even those who are not in their competition season. The Division I men’s tournament is highly publicized with multiple stories and game recaps across the participating teams. This is just one example of how one specific women’s sport that has a higher participation rate than their male counterpart is underexposed or underrepresented.

With outlets like ESPN, CBS, and ABC streaming live sports on all of their outlets, often in conjunction with a basic cable provider, broadcasting college sports today is easier and faster than ever. Watching college sports is a popular pastime of Americans, especially in regard to the March Madness men’s tournament or the FBS College Football Playoff Championship series. Viewers of all ages, even those that do not necessarily have a team in the playoffs or even truly enjoy sports, make brackets and join leagues to participate in the fun and excitement.

 The broadcast of these major events has become a billion-dollar project, and the revenue will only increase as the deal continues. First, the Division I men’s basketball championship tournament was the focal point of a 21-year deal between CBS and Turner Sports for the sole ownership and broadcast rights to the March Madness tournament. The deal, created in 2011 and extending until 2032, had an agreed upon total of $19.6 billion in rights fees. It gave CBS’s and Turner’s stations exclusivity to the biggest revenue driver in college athletics, and in 2011, the contract’s first year, there would be situations where four games would be streaming live at the same time because of the various networks within the deal that could give the tournament maximum coverage for the fans.

 The women’s tournament, which runs during practically the same time frame as the men’s tournament, has a contract that was set back in 2011 with ESPN. This deal extends until the 2023-2024 season and will bring the NCAA an additional $500 million across the duration of the contract. The NCAA similarly made a deal with ESPN to expand its coverage of women’s college basketball. This extension comes in alignment with the expanding networks and branches of ESPN’s coverage, such as conference specific networks and the variety of ESPN networks already in existence.

 While there is no female equivalent for the College Football Playoff, it is still interesting to note the revenue and its distribution among the FBS members. All of the conferences must still comply with the distribution guidelines as previously stated in order to receive their funds. Millions of dollars are allocated to institutions based solely on their participation in Division I football in the FBS, but are these funds being distributed ethically and fairly among the institutions that receive them? While the FBS playoffs are not overseen by the NCAA, this is just one example of the exposure that the men are given in comparison to women.

 Another example of highly broadcasted and televised championship events is the Division I Softball Women’s College World Series (WCWS) and the Baseball College World Series (CWS). During the 2015 and 2016 campaigns, the WCWS brought in better ratings on average than the CWS, which made headlines. The 2015 regular season played a large role in the increase in the 31% ratings increase for that year’s WCWS (Volner, 2016). ESPN broadcasted 44 regular season games across its channels leading up to the WCWS, and the SEC Network allowed more games, specifically in that conference, to increase the exposure for the women’s game. The following year in 2017, despite “a record-setting” year in terms of ratings and viewers, the softball championship’s viewer ratings did not surpass the ratings of the baseball championship coverage, with a margin of approximately 200,000 viewers between the two championship series.

This increase in viewers for the CWS despite the struggles from the 2015 and 2016 championships were in thanks to the decisions of ESPN executives and producers. One alteration was in the broadcasting by the announcers. The groups of announcers and the content discussed during the live streams changed to appeal to the storytelling aspects and color commentary that draws in and retains viewers better than extensive evaluation and play-by-play analysis to “tailor to college baseball fans’ interests” (Nyatawa, 2017).

The other change that was of slight concern was the choice of ESPN to “broadcast the majority of CWS games on its main channel, instead of ESPN2 or ESPNU” (Nyatawa, 2017). The WCWS is also broadcast on ESPN, so this was not a huge shift to compare to the CWS; however, this gave the CWS almost exclusive rights to the more easily accessible flagship station rather than spreading the coverage across the various channels. Yes, this aided in closing the concerning gap between the baseball and softball championship ratings, but it showed the lengths to which the NCAA went to in order to assert the male dominance and increase its broadcasting and exposure for a male sport to spite a female sport.

**Sponsorship of College Athletics.** Sponsorship of college athletics creates a great opportunity for businesses and companies to increase their exposure and expand their brand. For the 2017-2018 season, sponsorship spending was expected to reach $1.24 million for the NCAA and its Division I institutions (Sponsorship Spending, 2018). This number is 4.5 percent increase from the previous year, and that number can only be expected to increase in the future (Sponsorship Spending, 2018). The charts below indicate the categories that are most active for all NCAA schools and conferences as well as their most active brands for the 2017-2018 academic year.

Figure 4: All NCAA Schools and Conferences Most Active Categories (2018)



Figure 5: All NCAA Schools and Conferences Most Active Brands (2018)



Many of the names and categories listed above should not be much of a surprise to sports fans. The companies listed are some of the most common advertisements that are seen throughout any live televised sporting event. Companies like Gatorade and Nike that have a lot of brand alignment with sport and are easily recognizable across the globe, not just on the court or the field. Despite the obvious correlation between beverage and retail sponsors to athletics, the most active sponsorships for the NCAA as noted in the charts above as of the 2017-2018 academic year were insurance and automobile companies.

 Despite the increasing growth of sport sponsorship at the collegiate level, studies indicate that women’s college athletics is grossly under-sponsored in comparison to their male counterparts. An article in the Sports Business Journal cites a quote “Tom Kingsley, director of sport and sponsorship at Ernst & Young, recently noted to The [London] Independent that ‘less than half of one percent of sport sponsorship is invested in women’s sports’” (Fink, 2015). If that number sounds drastically lower than the overall $1.24 million expected for 2017-2018 as previously mentioned, that is because it is. Even one percent of that comes out to $10 thousand, which is a drop in the bucket in comparison to what the entire NCAA would be receiving.

 Fink highlights the many facts about consumer behavior and more specifically sport consumer behavior that raises many questions as to why the women’s sports receive such a small amount in sponsorship annually. Some examples of the consumer behavior described includes, “women control 70 to 80 percent of consumer purchases” and “women purchase more than 50 percent of traditionally male products, … and control more than 60 percent of all personal wealth in the United States” (Fink, 2015).

 The data presented shows the growth in women’s sports. Fink’s article details the increasing opportunities that companies have to sponsor women’s athletics. For example, “energy firm SSE became a sponsor of the Women’s FA Cup, Kia became the official partner of England Women’s Cricket, and Investec became the official sponsor of the Women’s Hockey League in England” (Fink, 2015). There is a direct and positive correlation between the growth in participation and involvement in women’s sports and the opportunities to expand and increase a company’s brand and positive image.

 The limitations and hesitations to sponsor women’s athletics center around the media exposure. The higher the ratings and more consistent the viewership for an event or a sport, the better chance the event or sport has to draw in revenue and increase its sponsorship opportunities. “Audiences grow with media hype, making sponsorship more appealing, while sponsorship support (and activation) increases consumer awareness and, subsequently, media attention” (Fink, 2015). This task of growing interest and exposure for female athletics is daunting one, especially considering some additional data that shows, “ESPN’s ‘SportsCenter’ devoted just two percent of all airtime to women’s sports in 2014, a figure that has remained steady since 1999” (Fink, 2015).

 Sponsorship of women’s athletics is something that has not even attempted to reach its full potential. With the growing coverage and attention given to empowering women today, “the untapped opportunity to connect with important consumer groups through women’s sports and female athletes” is a great opportunity for sponsorship investors to get ahead of what is expected to be a great increase in chances for advancement and involvement of women’s athletics globally (Fink, 2015). Joining the movement, or rather jumpstarting the movement, could be a great business decision that could provide positive brand image, increase in revenue, and ultimately

create a lasting impact on the company and the world of sport for years to come.

**Expansion of Women in Professional Sports.** The pioneers of women in athletics paved the way to where we are today in women’s involvement in professional sports. It is through the efforts of individuals such as Hope Solo, Serena Williams, Ronda Rousey, and Diana Taurasi that women are more respected and provided with more opportunities to be seen and showcase their talents and abilities. The expansion of women in professional sports can not only be seen on a national level but on an international level as well with major events such as the Olympics.

 Media outlets provide information through articles and segments on shows that highlight the negative aspects of women in professional sport, for example pay gaps and limited interest. A 2018 Nielsen study highlighted that in some cases, women’s sports are increasing in popularity. The 2018 article by Ross Andrews states, “The [2018 Nielsen] study showed more sports fans today not only enjoy but also believe in the women’s sports industry. Of the 84 percent of general sports fans today worldwide with an interest in women’s sports, 51 percent of those are men, which shows both men and women can be consumers of women’s athletics.” There are also data to support that the attendance numbers are increasing at these events. The WNBA had its highest average attendance in 2017 (7,716) since it reached its lifetime high in 1998 (Bonesteel, 2018). This statement indicates that women’s professional sport is growing in popularity to correlate with the growing interest and participation of women in athletics.

 One example that Andrews highlights as a key point in the growth in popularity of women’s professional athletics was the Rio 2016 field hockey gold medal match that drew “the largest TV audience for a single women’s sporting event” in Great Britain (2018). The 5.5 million viewing audience tuned in to witness the matchup between the Netherlands and Great Britain and even delayed the 10 o’clock news on BBC (Andrews, 2018). That moment for Rio 2016, while not the most popular moment for viewers in the United States, truly demonstrated what studies and professionals in the field have been persistently attempting to convey to the public that women’s professional sport is something that is growing and is here to stay. This also relates back to collegiate sport because it demonstrates the growth of talent that typically progresses to the professional level from college athletics, and the increased exposure is in part due to the growing attention paid to women’s athletics.

 To highlight the increase in participation and growth of women’s athletics, the Olympic website notes that the participation numbers for each individual Olympic Games is quickly approaching an even 50/50 split. As seen in the graphic titled “Female Athletes’ Participation” seen below, participation by women in the Olympics has grown dramatically since their introduction in the 1900s for the summer games and 1924 for the winter games. Today, the names of Simone Biles, Katie Ledecky, and Allyson Felix dominate the traditional news sources and coverage during their respective events and inspire participation for generations to come. Names such as these often inspire and encourage younger generations to pursue these sports beyond the recreational or high school levels. This is where we can see a direct relationship between college athletics and Olympic participation in that several college programs send athletes to the Olympics or their alumni heavily populate our Olympic rosters.

Figure 3: Female Athletes’ Participation (2019)



**Values-based View of the Current State of College Athletics**

**Catholic Views on Women**

The history of the Catholic church has provided its followers with many traditionalist views on women and their role in society. As time progressed, the views have slightly altered to reflect the growing desire for gender equality across the globe. Today Pope Francis, in the midst of the multiple scandals in the Catholic church and the priesthood, speaks out in defense of women’s equality in all aspects of life, even the more controversial issues that have been in the church for centuries.

 The only women that had any power in the early years of the Catholic church were nuns. These women held roles traditionally considered “nurturing roles” and that were traditionally held by women such as educators and nurses. It was difficult to set the groundwork for strong and confident women when the leaders of the church were men, and men were provided more opportunities to grow and be strong and independent.

 Besides the leadership roles, the Catholic church has had many stances on controversial issues that concern women. Pope Francis recently spoke on topics such as birth control, abortion, and sexual abuse that mostly center around women and are controversial in today’s society beyond just the Church. These issues raise questions that once were determined by early teachings of the Bible, but the Church has since been more publicly accepting of a woman’s body and a woman’s opinion on these topics.

 In an era when women’s rights are being advocated for across the globe with movements like #MeToo and the equal pay day, “Pope Francis says Catholic Church should support women’s rights” according to an article by Chico Harlan in the Washington Post. While Pope Francis recognized that the Church will remain steadfast on some of its most moral principles, women have rights just as men do and should be able to act in such a manner. The article states that, “Pope Francis calls for a church with ‘open doors’ that can acknowledge past ills and be attentive to women seeking ‘greater justice and equality’” (Harlan, 2019).

Ultimately, the Catholic church honors all of God’s children and recognizes that everyone is on this earth for a reason and should be able to pursue the life that they were meant to live, even women. Women have held roles that help foster and grow leaders throughout history, and the Church has honored them for their dignity and dedication to their tasks. As the Catholic church is evolving with some of the concerns of today, it is evident that equality for all should be in the near future.

To demonstrate such an example, Catholic Youth Organizations (CYO) provide opportunities for young athletes to participate in athletics and grow in their faith. The members of the CYO programs are able to compete in their sport, learn more about the church and how to live out their faith, and complete service opportunities throughout the community. The Archdiocese of Philadelphia, for example, has provided these opportunities since the mid-20th century and currently serves “14 regions and over 150 elementary schools” (2013).

As for women in sport, their exposure and their rights fall in alignment with much of what the current church leaders are advocating today. Pope Francis recently released a document in which he advocated for women’s rights and justice. In it, he called for better understanding of what the women of the church deserve because the church relies heavily on its young followers to grow and continue the faith and in order to do that they must be responsive of their desire for equality.

**Ethical Concerns**

In regard to the overall issues with women in college athletics, there are several moral values that are disrupted. The first is responsibility, or accounting for one’s actions. All involved with women in sport have a responsibility to provide fair and equal opportunity in all aspects of athletics, but they often fail in this area as seen in the disproportionate amount of broadcasting and air time the women receive. One could also find teleological concepts throughout the funding and exposure for women. This is a morals-based approach in which it is necessary to determine what one’s purpose is based on values and beliefs in order to form the right decision. In alignment with Pope Francis’s recent document, the Catholic church is expressing its support of women’s equality and the value they have, and so should college athletics.

 Specifically in intercollegiate athletics, there are some ethical issues surrounding female athletes. Recently, several strong advocates in college athletics for women’s rights spoke on these concerns. The women’s final four and national championship host press conferences before their games, and the University of Notre Dame’s head coach Muffet McGraw gave a powerful statement in which the ultimate message was that being a successful woman should not be an exception, rather it should be encouraged and recognized as a norm or something young women can attain. Often during broadcasts of the women’s game, they discuss the female coach’s outfits and fashion choices rather than focusing on the action on the court or field. On the same day as McGraw’s interview, University of Connecticut head coach Geno Auriemma provided an equally strong response that the Division I men’s coaches would never be asked some of the questions that Auriemma is, and that is an area of concern because the focus should be on the game and the dedication and talent of the athletes rather than their physical appearance or other feminine aspects.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, exposure and funding for women at the collegiate level is still far behind the level of the men. The history of women in sports reflects the current struggle the women face today. The passage of Title IX aided in closing the gap and providing more equality and limited discrimination on the basis of sex, but this legislation still has some work to do so that Title IX can help minimize the inequality for the women. It is through major events such as the men’s March Madness tournament compared to the women’s national championship in basketball that the discrepancy in exposure and funding is most prevalent. While participation and opportunities to compete in sport has increased throughout history, women still have a long road before they come close to that of the men.

 Throughout my research for this paper, I have come to better understand how my Catholic values and faith connect with my involvement in college athletics. In my pursuit of a career in college athletics, I will encounter many situations in which I can advocate for the women’s programs. As the Catholic church attempts to garner support from the younger generations for women’s rights and equality for all, so too will I in my career to provide young female athletes with better exposure and funding in order to succeed in all aspects that their male counterparts do. We have all been created in the image and likeness of God, and he loves us all equally. It is on these grounds that I will continue to pray for equality in college athletics.

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