

ABSTRACT

The Best in the *Women's* Game: Examining How Success Influences Gender Inequities in College Basketball

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The 2021 Women's NCAA Basketball Tournament brought national attention to the issue of inequity in women's college sports. However, existing research has proven that disparities between treatment of female and male athletes in terms of financial resources, fan support, and media coverage are longstanding. In this project, I use the *Waco Tribune-Herald's (Trib)* coverage of the Baylor Women's Basketball Team, personnel interviews, Baylor's Equity in Athletics Disclosure Act (EADA) Reports, and data from *USA Today's* gender equity study to examine whether success of female athletic programs helps minimize the differences in treatment they receive. My findings suggest that while women's success in sport helps reduce inequities to an extent, disparities in media coverage and financial resources still exist even among the most successful women's sports teams. These findings indicate that while women have come a long way toward equity in the 50 years since the passage of Title IX, there is still a long way to go to fully achieve equity in women's college sports.

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GENDER INEQUITIES IN COLLEGE BASKETBALL

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

“If you aren’t upset about this problem, then you’re a part of it” was the challenge issued by Oregon Women’s Basketball Forward Sedona Prince at the end of her viral Tik Tok video during the 2021 Women’s NCAA Tournament.¹ In the video, which garnered 12.3 million views on Tik Tok alone, Prince showed the weights given to the women’s players in comparison to the men’s basketball players, and the differences shocked many. The women were given six pairs of dumbbells on one rack to share among the 64 teams in the tournament. The men on the other hand were given multiple racks of dumbbells, squat racks, and barbells to use. Upon release of the video, the NCAA tried to attribute the deficiency to lack of space for a larger weight room for the women; however, Prince also called out the NCAA by showing how much open space was available for the weights.

Prince’s Tik Tok drew widespread attention to women’s athletics and sparked discussions about equity within the NCAA. The discrepancies were blatant and unable to be explained away as attributable to any factor other than gender bias. The NCAA was forced to commission a gender-equity review into college basketball and make changes it

¹ Sedona Prince (@Sedonerrr), “It’s 2021 and We Are Still Fighting for Bits and Pieces of Equality,” TikTok video, March 18, 2021, <https://www.tiktok.com/@sedonerrr/video/6941180880127888646?lang=en>.

had previously resisted. For example, the women's postseason tournament is now branded "March Madness," a brand previously reserved only for the men's tournament, and now each and every expense for the two tournaments is carefully examined to ensure a similar incident won't happen again.

Sedona Prince's prominence and the fact that these blatant inequities were happening to the most successful teams in women's college basketball brought attention to the problems that was necessary for change to occur. However, many issues later identified in the report published by the NCAA's gender equity review commission were systemic inequities that have not been resolved in the 2 years since. As a result, many forms of inequities still exist even at the highest level of women's college athletics. In this thesis, I argue that women's success in sport helps reduce these inequities to an extent; however, despite the fact that women's college athletics have seen drastic improvements towards equity in recent decades, glaring disparities still exist between treatment of female athletes and male athletes. To support my argument, I examined the *Waco Tribune-Herald's (Trib)* coverage of the Baylor Women's Basketball Team across three national championship seasons, and conducted several interviews with *Trib* sportswriters, a former Baylor women's basketball player, longtime Baylor sports broadcasters, and Baylor media and communications team personnel. Additionally, I analyzed Baylor's Equity in Athletics Disclosure Act (EADA) reports for data on financial equity across men's and women's sports and compared Baylor's data to existing data gathered in a study conducted by *USA Today* examining equity in women's sports across the NCAA. What follows is a brief review of the NCAA gender equity report followed by a literature review highlighting other forms of discrimination common in

women's sports, especially lackluster media coverage that is different in both content and quantity from men's sport media coverage.

NCAA Report

The NCAA's gender-equity review determined that "the experience of the women's [basketball] tournament participants was markedly different from and inferior to that of the men's tournament participants."² The review also discovered 4 "systemic gender equity issues at the NCAA which must be remediated" in order to achieve equitable treatment of female athletes. These 4 issues include:

- 1) *"The NCAA's organizational structure and culture prioritizes men's basketball, contributing to gender inequity."* Many coaches and staff members who work for women's basketball teams report to men's basketball personnel. Furthermore, when tasked with managing both men's and women's basketball, NCAA and university officials often spend more time and energy working with men's basketball than with women's basketball. Additionally, women's basketball committees are typically comprised of people who are of less senior status than the people on the men's basketball committees, which limits the impact they are able to make in advocating for women's basketball. Finally, the spending gaps seen in the 2021 tournament were not isolated incidents. For the 2019 tournaments, the difference in spending between the men's tournament and the women's tournament was \$35 million, highlighting continued and longstanding differences that were left unchecked because the

² Kaplan, Hecker, & Fink, "Report - NCAA Gender Review," 2021, <https://ncaagenderequityreview.com>.

NCAA did not have any person or committee designated to monitor spending and ensure gender equity.

- 2) *“The structure of the NCAA’s media agreements perpetuates gender inequity.”* The NCAA women’s and men’s basketball media contracts are different. CBS pays the NCAA around \$1.1 billion annually in a contract that requires CBS to broadcast the Division 1 Men’s Basketball Championship and support the NCAA’s Corporate Partner Program, which benefits all NCAA Championships. Because CBS owns the rights to the sponsorship program for all sports, it has great influence in how sponsorships are created and promoted. However, because CBS also owns the broadcasting rights to men’s basketball alone, CBS is incentivized to encourage sponsorship for men’s basketball over any other sport because doing so benefits CBS more so than sponsorships for other sports. In contrast, ESPN owns the rights to broadcast the NCAA Women’s Division 1 Basketball Championship along with the remaining 29 NCAA Division 1 championships. All 30 of these sports must thus compete for airtime and sponsorships within ESPN. As a result, women’s basketball and the other NCAA sports besides men’s basketball are given significantly less attention and financial resources. While on the one hand, ESPN is doing some of these 30 sports which do not typically attract large audiences (such as wrestling or fencing) a service by broadcasting them, there is evidence to suggest that women’s basketball should no longer be grouped into contracts with less popular sports. For example, ESPN pays the NCAA around \$34 million per year to broadcast all 30 championships, but financial

expert Ed Desser found the women's basketball championship *alone* to be valued at between \$81 to \$112 million. Continuing to include women's basketball in this media contract is significantly undervaluing it.

- 3) *“The NCAA’s revenue distribution model prioritizes and rewards investment in men’s basketball.”* Each year, the NCAA distributes the majority of its revenue back to the athletic conferences of its member universities with the majority of the amount distributed to each conference given through the “Basketball Fund.” However, through the Basketball Fund, revenue given back to each athletic conference is determined solely by the performance of the men's basketball teams at the Division I Men's National Tournament. The better the men's basketball teams of each conference do, the more money the conference is given. Because revenue redistribution is determined solely from the men's team's performance, there is more incentive for universities to gear resources and attention to men's basketball programs to help them succeed.
- 4) *“The disparity in participation opportunities for men’s and women’s basketball further impacts the student-athlete experience.”* The men's tournament is bigger and allows more teams to take part. Traditionally, 68 teams were invited to participate in the men's tournament, while only 64 teams were invited to the women's tournament. The change was made to the women's tournament in 2022 to invite 68 teams to the tournament. However, the NCAA does not oversee or operate the women's National Invitational Tournament (NIT) while it does so for the men's, further contributing to the lack of opportunities for female athletes provided by the NCAA. The NIT is a

postseason tournament that the top 32 men's teams and top 64 women's teams who did not make the NCAA tournament are invited to compete in. While more women's teams are invited to play in this consolation tournament than men's teams, the Women's National Invitational Tournament (WNIT) is its own entity not governed by the NCAA, so these opportunities cannot be attributed to actions on the part of the NCAA.

Literature Review

As the NCAA gender equity review makes clear, differences in media coverage are common and serve to maintain and even exacerbate gender inequities in college sports. One thing to note in examining media coverage from sources outside of universities is that while universities may influence how their athletes are covered, they do not control media coverage. As a result, findings from outside media sources offer a societal perspective on female athletes and insight into whether people and entities who are not required to promote gender equity do so anyway. One longitudinal study examining coverage of women's sports across major television news networks found female athletes only received between 1% and 5% of the station's total sport's coverage.³ The lack of airtime for female athletes can be attributed to fewer stories being produced as well as the stories that are produced about female athletes being shorter than stories about male athletes. In 2017, Musto et al. found that women's sports stories broadcast on

³ Michela Musto, Cheryl Cooky, and Michael A. Messner. "'From Fizzle to Sizzle!' Televised Sports News and the Production of Gender-Bland Sexism." *Gender & Society* 31, no. 5 (October 1, 2017): 573–96. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243217726056>.

Sportscenter that year were nearly 50% shorter than stories of men's sports.⁴ In addition, the men's big 3 sports of football, basketball, and baseball were covered in depth whether they were in or out of season and whether or not a team won or lost its most recent game. The same could not be said of women's sports, which as Cooky et al. argue in their 2021 report, are typically "one and done," occasionally receiving bursts of media coverage during elite or international competitions, but not for long and not once the competitions end.⁵ Eventually, women's sport stories are "eclipsed by the steady stream of men's sports, which are covered in season, out of season, with more energy, and at higher production values."⁶

In addition to differences in the *amount* of coverage afforded to female athletes, the *type* of coverage female athletes receive has also been found to differ from that of the men's. Women's sports are often presented in a monotone, matter of fact style, while men's sports typically receive more vocal inflections, high volume exclamations, rapid fire speech, descriptive language, and nicknames used to develop endearing commentaries. Humor and descriptive language are also regularly reserved for men's sports, with women's sports stories often solely given the literal descriptions of the events

⁴ Musto et al., "From Fizzle to Sizzle!"

⁵ Cheryl Cooky, Michael A. Messner, and Michela Musto. "'It's Dude Time!'" A Quarter Century of Excluding Women's Sports in Televised News and Highlight Shows." *Communication & Sport* 3, no. 3 (2015): 261-287. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2167479515588761>; Cheryl Cooky, LaToya D. Council, Maria A. Mears, and Michael A. Messner. "One And Done: The Long Eclipse of Women's Televised Sports, 1989–2019." *Communication & Sport* 9, no. 3 (2021): 347-371. <https://doi.org/10.1177/21674795211003524>.

⁶ Christy McCarter. "Overlooking Her Shot: Women's Sports Need an Assist as Coverage Remains the Same as 30 Years Ago." *Purdue University* 24 (2021). <https://www.purdue.edu/newsroom/releases/2021/Q1/overlooking-her-shot-womens-sports-need-an-assist-as-coverage-remains-the-same-as-30-years-ago.html>.

that occur.⁷ Indeed, many researchers share the consensus that such subpar media coverage presents female athletes as less interesting and inferior to their male counterparts. Additionally, scholars such as Dr. Joshua Senne, a researcher at the intersection of business and sport, note that sports began as a male-dominated industry, and the continued dominance of men in sports has allowed the promotion of masculine norms and gender inequality to become an institutionalized practice throughout the long history of sport and into the present day.⁸

While existing research suggests female athletes routinely receive subpar media coverage and financial resources, in this study, I use the Baylor Women's Basketball Team as a case study to examine whether success on the court can influence media coverage and treatment of female athletes in women's college sports. The first chapter focuses on local media coverage of the Baylor Women's Basketball Team through a contextual analysis of the *Waco Tribune Herald*. I discuss differences in the type of language used to describe Baylor's female basketball players versus language used to describe Baylor's male basketball players. The second chapter focuses on more tangible treatment variables, and I analyze the Equity in Athletics Disclosure Act (EADA) reports and expenses for Baylor Athletics.⁹ The final chapter compares Baylor Athletics' treatment of female athletes with other schools across the NCAA using research gathered

⁷ Musto et al., "From Fizzle to Sizzle!"

⁸ Joshua A. Senne, "Examination of Gender Equity and Female Participation in Sport," *The Sport Journal (blog)*, February 26, 2016, <https://thesportjournal.org/article/examination-of-gender-equity-and-female-participation-in-sport/>; Richard C. Bell, "A History of Women in Sport Prior to Title IX," *The Sport Journal* 10, no. 2 (March 22, 2007), <https://go.gale.com/ps/i.do?p=AONE&sw=w&issn=15439518&v=2.1&it=r&id=GALE%7CA170414841&sid=googleScholar&linkaccess=abs>.

⁹ Equity in Athletics Disclosure Act (EADA) reports will be discussed more in chapter 2.

by *USA Today* and Syracuse University's Knight-Newhouse Data Project. Finally, I conclude by discussing what these findings tell us about women's college athletics and the treatment of female athletes, and why this issue matters for female athletes and society at large.

CHAPTER TWO

Local Media Coverage of Women's Sports: A Review of *The Waco Tribune-Herald*

Research on sport media coverage of female athletes has consistently found practices that trivialize female athletes' athleticism and convey their participation in sport as inferior to that of their male counterparts.¹ Although women have made dramatic progress in cultivating acceptance in realms of society traditionally reserved for men, including in sport, discriminatory representations are still pervasive in mainstream media. Early studies in the discipline focused on instances of overt sexism, with foundational studies finding that in addition to criticism of female athletes' abilities, the topics typically highlighted during female athletic events differed greatly from the topics highlighted during men's athletic events. Rather than focus on players' athleticism or skill during coverage of the women's games, reporters often chose to focus on positive consonance (e.g. she's having a great game tonight), personality (e.g. she has a fun-loving attitude), looks and appearance (e.g. she towers over her opponents), and background (e.g. she grew up in Austin).² Furthermore, even when discussing the game at hand, success was often attributed to factors outside the athletes' control rather than to

¹ Andrew C. Billings, Kelby K. Halone, and Bryan E. Denham. "'Man, That Was a Pretty Shot:' An Analysis of Gendered Broadcast Commentary Surrounding the 2000 Men's and Women's NCAA Final Four Basketball Championships." *Mass Communication & Society* 5, no. 3 (2002): 295-315. https://doi.org/10.1207/S15327825MCS0503_4; Janet S. Fink, "Female Athletes, Women's Sport, and the Sport Media Commercial Complex: Have We Really 'Come a Long Way, Baby'?" *Sport Management Review* 18, no. 3 (July 1, 2015): 331-42, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.smr.2014.05.001>; Linda Fuller. *Sport, Rhetoric, and Gender: Historical perspectives and Media Representations*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006.

² Billings et al., "Man, That Was a Pretty Shot."

their own skill, as athletes were frequently described as lucky rather than good, or that it was just “their night.”³ These findings have been replicated across a variety of studies, with modern-day analyses confirming that physical appearance, femininity, and heterosexuality are focused on more than athleticism in women’s sports.⁴

Even as these differences in topic remain prevalent today, recent research confirms that trends in sexism in sport are changing. While displays of overt sexism and discrimination, such as barring women from playing sports or openly insulting female athletes, were once commonplace, such displays of sexism in media have become more implicit and subtle.⁵ One prominent form of subtle sexism is using bland and lackluster language in coverage of women’s sporting events. Often, women’s sports are presented in a monotone, matter-of-fact style that lacks descriptive language, humor, and dominant language, which makes the games seem less exciting and interesting.⁶

Another common phenomenon is “gender marking.” Gender marking occurs when athletic events for women’s teams are referred to as the *women’s* events (such as the Women’s NCAA National Championship) or stellar athletes are referred to as being the best in the *women’s* game. In contrast, men’s events are simply referred to as the name of the event (NCAA National Championship), and stellar athletes are referred to as

³ Billings et al., “Man, That Was a Pretty Shot.”

⁴ Fink, “Have We Really “Come a Long Way, Baby?””

⁵ Janet S. Fink, “Hiding in Plain Sight: The Embedded Nature of Sexism in Sport,” *Journal of Sport Management* 30, no. 1 (January 1, 2016): 1–7, <https://doi.org/10.1123/jism.2015-0278>; Michela Musto, Cheryl Cooky, and Michael A. Messner. ““From Fizzle to Sizzle!” Televised Sports News and the Production of Gender-Bland Sexism.” *Gender & Society* 31, no. 5 (2017): 573-596. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243217726056>.

⁶ Musto et al, “From Fizzle to Sizzle”

the best in the game. By separating and emphasizing women's gender, masculinity is presented as the standard, making women's athletics and athletes appear to be different, and by effect, inferior.⁷ Thus, differences in topic, lackluster coverage, and gender marking are the major media coverage problems women's athletes face today.

Given the findings of how media coverage often marginalizes women's talent and athleticism, I wanted to see if similar patterns exist at Baylor University. One of the most common arguments against equitable coverage of women's athletics is that they are not as competitive as men's athletics or that their play is not interesting enough to warrant quality coverage or attract viewers. While this is not true, and it is important to give women in sport the coverage they deserve no matter what, the Baylor Women's Basketball Program mutes those arguments. Having won 13 Big XII Conference Championships (12 of those in consecutive years), 3 NCAA national championships, and boasting a slew of Big XII and National Players of the year, the Baylor Women's Basketball Program is a nationally recognized leader in its sport. This success has demanded media attention and university-wide support. Thus, any findings of inequities in media coverage for Baylor Women's Basketball cannot be attributed to poor performance or not being good enough to attract viewers. In this chapter, I show how the amount of media coverage the Baylor Women's Basketball Team receives as well as the topics discussed in that coverage is influenced by the team's success; however, even with successful seasons over the past decade, their media coverage is still not equitable to media coverage of Baylor Men's Basketball.

⁷ Billings et al., "Man, That Was a Pretty Shot."

The present study focuses on the Baylor Women's Basketball Team's representation in local media and how local media coverage of its female athletes has changed over the years. Additionally, I compare the media coverage of the Baylor women's team to coverage of the Baylor men's team. There is indeed no shortage of research available to the public comparing men's versus women's sports media coverage, and it is not my intention to villainize male athletes or fans of male sports nor is it my intention to heap more complaints onto an already abundant pile of data. However, given the newfound subtlety of discrimination in sports coverage, a comparison to men's coverage is necessary in order to fully understand these trends in the media as well as to highlight the need for future reform. Here, I focus on the themes specific to local media representation of women's athletes at Baylor. The following analysis looks at media coverage of the Baylor Women's Basketball Team across the three National Championship seasons (2004-2005, 2011-2012, and 2018-2019) and assesses the presence or absence of the common media coverage practices discussed previously. Additionally, I compare each season to see if and how these practices changed over time. National Championship years were chosen specifically for analysis so that any discrepancies in coverage content or quality could not simply be attributed to the team not being good enough to warrant coverage.

Method

To analyze media coverage of the women's basketball team at Baylor, I conducted a qualitative analysis of the *Waco Tribune-Herald (Trib)*, Waco's daily newspaper. A textual analysis was the most feasible option as it allowed me to look at a larger scope of time in more detail, which is why the focus was on a newspaper rather

than on more modern radio or broadcast coverage. Additionally, the *Trib* covers local news in the Waco and Baylor area, including Baylor athletics, and its papers reach readers both within the Baylor student body and the Waco community. Furthermore, a variety of sportswriters cover the Baylor Women's Basketball Team's games, offering multiple viewpoints and signifying that any findings are not merely the reflection of one person's point of view. Thus, the *Trib*'s local focus, variety of perspectives, and influence on the community also made it an optimal source to analyze in the present study.

I also analyzed articles from a year the team did not win the national championship: the 1997-1998 season. This season is widely considered to be the turning point for the Baylor Women's Basketball Program in terms of gaining relevancy and fan support after making its first appearance in the postseason at the Women's National Invitational Tournament (WNIT) Championship Game. Thus, 1997-1998 provides an interesting pivot point from which to compare the type of coverage the women's basketball team garnered before winning public and media support with the type of coverage it received after gaining more support and success.

For each season, I analyzed articles published from the date of the first game of the season to the date of the last game of the season. Articles were accessed via the *Waco Tribune-Herald* online archives and Baylor Libraries microfilm collection. I analyzed the content from the *Waco Trib* articles in a two-step process: thematic analysis and digital software analysis. First, I read and thematically analyzed articles by counting appearances of topics in coverage, which were classified through 16 categories created by

Eastman and Billings' 2001 framework.⁸ Eastman and Billings created this framework through analyzing all college basketball games broadcast on network television during February and March 1999 for recurring trends of racial and gender stereotyping. This framework has been used in a variety of studies of media throughout the years and is regarded as a gold standard in the field. The categories include:

- (a) physicality and athleticism (e.g., can physically dominate the lane),
- (b) intelligence and mental skill (e.g., can read defenses easily),
- (c) hard work and effort (e.g., going the extra mile tonight),
- (d) determination and motivation (e.g., he simply won't let them lose),
- (e) speed (e.g., blows past everyone),
- (f) positive consonance (e.g., he's feeling it),
- (g) negative consonance (e.g., her entire game is completely off),
- (h) leadership (e.g., everyone follows from her example),
- (i) versatility (e.g., he does it all out there),
- (j) team orientation (e.g., always does what is best for the team),
- (k) physical power (e.g., knocks him over on the way to the hoop),
- (l) mental power (her smarts are the top reason she dominates),
- (m) personality (e.g., if you've ever met her, you'd know she's a good kid),
- (n) looks and appearance (e.g., sleek body),
- (o) background (e.g., grew up in Compton), and
- (p) other (e.g., she does not always get the credit she deserves).

⁸ Susan T. Eastman, Andrew C. Billings, "Biased Voices of Sports: Racial and Gender Stereotyping in College Basketball Announcing," *Howard Journal of Communication* 12 (October 1, 2001): 183–201, <https://doi.org/10.1080/106461701753287714>.

Once I analyzed the articles for the presence of these specific themes, I ran the articles from each season through ATLAS.ti, a free qualitative data analysis software, to determine the presence or absence of specific words. I used the software's word counts to compare the types of language present across each of the women's seasons. I also ran articles from the corresponding seasons for the Baylor men's team through ATLAS.ti for analysis and compared the presence of words in those articles with the presence or absence of words in the women's articles.

Findings from 1997-1998 Season

The first season I analyzed from the *Waco Tribune-Herald* was the 1997-1998 season. As mentioned previously, the unprecedented success of this season, culminating in the program's first-ever appearance in the WNIT Final, led to this season being widely regarded as a turning point for the Baylor Women's Basketball Program even though they lost to Penn State in the final game. As a result of the team's success this season, institutional support for the women's basketball team and women's athletics at Baylor increased, as did local and national media attention. However, prior to this increase in attention, the *Trib* articles written about the women's team for the duration of the season tended to focus on basic physical skills, such as shooting or dribbling, and team orientation, emphasizing cooperation and chemistry. Little attention was paid to the players' speed or athleticism, and language that suggested power or dominance was scarce.

There is a noticeable lack of coverage of the women's team this season, both in terms of the number of articles published and the length of those articles. The stories appear to be the bare minimum in number with one article before and one after the

games, though many games listed on the schedule for that year did not receive any corresponding narrative article written by the *Waco Tribune-Herald*. In those instances, box scores were given in the snapshot section for the day with the rest of the sports, but that was all the attention devoted to the game. This likely indicates that the *Trib* did not send a reporter to attend and cover the game. Indeed, it wasn't until the program's success in the postseason, that women's basketball began to receive more coverage. However, it is important to note that much of the *Trib*'s coverage of Baylor Women's Basketball during this season focused on things beyond the scope of the individual games, specifically on how the team's recent success would impact Baylor's women's athletic programs, and what this meant for interest in women's sports in the future. For example, on March 31, 1998, just days after the Lady Bear's WNIT Finals appearance, the headline "Lady Bears' success sparks interest in women's athletics" appeared across the front page of the *Trib*.⁹ The corresponding article highlighted how the program's success led administrators to view women's basketball as a potential revenue-generating sport, and how as a result, it was now worthy of funneling resources, attention, and funding into. Winning brought attention to the women's basketball team, and while their success on a national stage brought pride to the institution as a whole, and understandably sparked this interest, the challenge would be to maintain that interest.

Despite the celebration from administration, spectators remained skeptical about women's sports. *Trib* sportswriter, John Werner, wrote how "it is difficult to persuade some people that women's sports can be fun to watch" and that "people, for whatever

⁹ John Werner, "Lady Bears' Success Sparks Interest in Women's Athletics." *The Waco Tribune-Herald*. (1998)

reason, have the opinion of women's basketball, that it's not as good."¹⁰ Werner also often emphasized the difference in the physicality and athleticism between the men's players and the women's players. In one article, he stated that "since most women can't use slam dunks to get the crowd into the game, they must rely on their fundamental skills and teamwork to win."¹¹ While it is true that most women cannot dunk, the writer falsely assumes that without this component in the game, the women have no other way to show off their athleticism to attract crowds. Whether this insinuation was done consciously or subconsciously, indicating the women's players have no athleticism simply because they cannot dunk is a logical fallacy that advances harmful rhetoric about the women's game and serves to diminish the players' status as athletes. A male freshman Baylor student at the time backed up Werner's sentiments, claiming he didn't go to the women's games because "they're not as active. They don't dunk" and that this "lack of physical showmanship" kept many students like him away from the games.¹²

In the seasons that followed the 97-98 championship appearance, similar disinterest in the women's game and athleticism occurred, as the team did not see success on the court as they did in the 1997-1998 season. Much of the coverage in the three years that followed was directed at emphasizing the struggle the team had to win. The *Trib's* commentary was disparaging of the team's skill and effort, with comments such as John Werner's in 1998 "The Lady Bears had difficulty hitting point-blank shots and also

¹⁰ Werner, "Lady Bears' Success"

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

struggled outside"¹³ and, when the team was in LA to play the University of Southern California in 1999, “about the only highlight for the team is when they saw Jim Carrey walking into the premiere of *Man on the Moon* at Mann’s Chinese theatre.”¹⁴ Indeed, despite the previous success, the enthusiasm for women’s basketball was short lived, as the Baylor women were not portrayed as dominant or athletic, but as the ones getting dominated.

Thus, findings show that although the women had come a long way in coverage in a matter of 3 years, they still had far to go in terms of receiving equitable coverage that highlighted their athleticism.

Findings from 2004-2005 Season

The Baylor Women’s Basketball Program won its first NCAA National Championship in the 2004-2005 season, and the tone and themes of the coverage in articles from this season are noticeably different from that of the 1997-1998 season. First, rather than speculate on the limited athleticism of Baylor’s players as was the case in the 1997-1998 season, the *Trib*’s coverage fondly writes of the players’ skills and success of the team. The sportswriters make frequent mentions of the dynamic post duo of Stephanie Blackmon and Sophia Young as “one of the best post tandems in the country”¹⁵ and the outside shooting threats of other players like Chameka Scott and Emily Niemann are

¹³ Special to the *Tribune-Herald*, “So. Cal Drowns Ice-Cold BU, 71-53.” *Waco Tribune-Herald (TX)*. December 20, 1999. Available from NewsBank: Access World News: <https://infoweb-newsbank-com.ezproxy.baylor.edu/apps/news/document-view?p=AWNB&docref=news/105E4B3F1AFD19C3>.

¹⁴ Special to the *Tribune-Herald*, “So. Cal”

¹⁵ Jerry Hill, "3-Point Shot Key in Lady Bear Scheme." *Waco Tribune-Herald (TX)*, March 19, 2005. *NewsBank: Access World News*. <https://infoweb-newsbank-com.ezproxy.baylor.edu/apps/news/document-view?p=AWNB&docref=news/108F5EE2B8F2FD14>.

celebrated as well. Emphasis was placed on how deep the team was skill wise, with multiple threats that made stopping Baylor from scoring difficult.

Applying Eastman and Billings' framework, themes of appearance, background, and skill were mentioned the most frequently. The mention of appearance was most interesting, and particular attention was paid to the height of Baylor's post players. The class of freshmen recruited that season was intentionally made up of taller players to compensate for the shorter, quicker recruits from the previous class. As a result, Baylor boasted many players over 6 feet on its roster, and heights were frequently reported with a player before saying her name if she was over 6 feet tall. For example, Chameka Scott and Steffanie Blackmon were often introduced as "Chameka Scott, a 6-foot junior guard" and "6-foot-2 senior post Steffanie Blackmon."¹⁶ Additionally, lineups were depicted as especially formidable when opponents had many players over 6 feet. While height is important to basketball and plays a role in athleticism, in mentioning height, emphasis is still drawn to a players' body. Furthermore, a focus on players heights when they are taller than the average woman is consistent with research that suggests media often highlights athletes who defy traditional norms of femininity.¹⁷ The media likes uniqueness, because that is what makes a story new, interesting, and worth telling. By being so tall, players provide that uniqueness and warrant coverage, as we see in this season.

¹⁶ Jerry Hill, "BU Opponent Vastly Improved." *Waco Tribune-Herald (TX)*, November 23, 2004. *NewsBank: Access World News*. <https://infoweb-newsbank-com.ezproxy.baylor.edu/apps/news/document-view?p=AWNB&docref=news/1068B63C1727E857>.

¹⁷ Pamela J. Creedon, ed. *Women, media and sport: Challenging Gender Values*. Sage, 1994.

One final note about the coverage this season is that Baylor's dominance was mentioned frequently in individual games, such as when sportswriter Jerry Hill stated, "the Lady Bears have made such a quick jump to the nation's elite under coach Kim Mulkey-Robertson" and when John Werner claimed that "The Lady Bears looked more dominant than ever in the win over Penn State."¹⁸ However, mentions of dominance become more prominent and emphatic near the end of the season once the team had already experienced high levels of success. Noticeably, qualifiers were often employed in the articles from the beginning of the season to avoid giving out too resounding of a compliment. For example, the team was described as "almost scary"¹⁹ and "a pretty good basketball team"²⁰ following early blowout wins in the season. However, once the team moved into the NCAA tournament, coverage of their wins became less reserved. After one particular win, John Werner wrote how "Baylor polished a resume that was already sparkling"²¹ and following the championship win, the players were deemed the "toast of

¹⁸ John Werner, "Tip-Off Invitation Reflects BU Status." *Waco Tribune-Herald (TX)*, November 10, 2004. *NewsBank: Access World News*. <https://infoweb-newsbank-com.ezproxy.baylor.edu/apps/news/document-view?p=AWNB&docref=news/10646CD6B1CF3DC8>.

¹⁹ Jerry Hill, "Dominant (No Lyin')." *Waco Tribune-Herald (TX)*, December 12, 2004. *NewsBank: Access World News*. <https://infoweb-newsbank-com.ezproxy.baylor.edu/apps/news/document-view?p=AWNB&docref=news/106EFB58A2882CB7>.

²⁰ Jerry Hill, "KMR Liked What She Saw in Washington." *Waco Tribune-Herald (TX)*, December 17, 2004. *NewsBank: Access World News*. <https://infoweb-newsbank-com.ezproxy.baylor.edu/apps/news/document-view?p=AWNB&docref=news/1070A298DF9532FE>.

²¹ John Werner, "Lady Bears Make Case for #1 Regional Seeding." *Waco Tribune-Herald (TX)*, March 13, 2005. *NewsBank: Access World News*. <https://infoweb-newsbank-com.ezproxy.baylor.edu/apps/news/document-view?p=AWNB&docref=news/108D104C8A2A3A40>.

the town, marshals of the parade and undisputed queens of the Big 12” with “more TV exposure than Congress”²² Thus, it is evident how better coverage came with success.

Findings from 2011-2012 Season

The 2011-2012 season is unique in the program; it’s the only season the team maintained a perfect 40-0 win-loss record. Having no losses to report on makes even the most ill-intentioned reporter hard-pressed to find a way to give anything short of a glowing review of the players’ performances. This year is also unique due to the outlier of Brittney Griner who was the star of the program. The 6’7” center, known for her stretch wingspan, fierce blocks, and overall dominance of the game, was a key contributor to the Bears’ success. *Trib* sportswriter Brice Cherry painted Griner as “the most intimidating post in the country”²³ who “towered over” her opponents²⁴ and was capable of “two-handed, rim-hanging jam[s].”²⁵ Coverage provided enthusiastic and relevant commentary on her athleticism and success; however, much of the coverage centered around the mention of her 6’7” frame.

Looking at the season and coverage of the team as a whole, classification according to Eastman and Billings’ framework found that personality was one of the

²² Jerry Hill, "Lady Bears Set Big 12 Triumphs Aside." *Waco Tribune-Herald (TX)*, March 19, 2005. *NewsBank: Access World News*. <https://infoweb-newsbank-com.ezproxy.baylor.edu/apps/news/document-view?p=AWNB&docref=news/108F5EE25EDE1FDD>.

²³ Brice Cherry, "SEASON IN REVIEW: No Cupcakes for Lady Bears on Way to Title Feast." *Waco Tribune-Herald (TX)*, April 8, 2012. *NewsBank: Access World News*. <https://infoweb-newsbank-com.ezproxy.baylor.edu/apps/news/document-view?p=AWNB&docref=news/13E042FFD418F948>.

²⁴ Brice Cherry, "1 Down, 5 to Go." *Waco Tribune-Herald (TX)*, March 19, 2012. *NewsBank: Access World News*. <https://infoweb-newsbank-com.ezproxy.baylor.edu/apps/news/document-view?p=AWNB&docref=news/13D9AC7C74287E48>.

²⁵ Cherry, “SEASON IN REVIEW”

most commonly occurring themes discussed across all articles, as there was extensive effort made to familiarize the reader with the players who were on the court, humanizing them, and presenting them as more than just athletes there to perform. Stories included details of how the players danced to the Isley Brothers' "shout" and "whooped and hollered" after made baskets during one particularly exciting and energetic win.²⁶ Players like Jordan Madden were discussed as having learned to "harness her fun-loving nature" and balance it with a "relentlessly feisty attitude."²⁷ And of course, Brittney Griner was the "personable, tweetable center of attention."²⁸ This emphasis on personality was undoubtedly meant to boost the players' likeability and add depth to the stories published beyond that of mere focus on sports or athleticism. However, dominance, determination, and athleticism were equally highlighted in the articles as well.

In terms of the type of language used, an interesting trend to note is that the articles written about the team during the NCAA Tournament were noticeably more descriptive in their language, using a wider variety of adjectives to describe the players, than in articles written during the regular season. Such findings are consistent with the idea that for women to warrant better coverage, they have to "earn it" by being successful. Interest in women's athletics is not the default as it is in men's, and the Baylor Women's Basketball Team's coverage became noticeably more enthusiastic and focused

²⁶ Cherry, "1 Down, 5 to Go."

²⁷ Brice Cherry, "Lady Bears Rely on NCAA Tournament Experience." *Waco Tribune-Herald (TX)*, March 24, 2012. *NewsBank: Access World News*. <https://infoweb-newsbank-com.ezproxy.baylor.edu/apps/news/document-view?p=AWNB&docref=news/13DB52EC1DDB9DA0>.

²⁸ Brice Cherry, "Summitt's Possible Swan Song Shrouds Lady Bears' Path." *Waco Tribune-Herald (TX)*, March 26, 2012. *NewsBank: Access World News*. <https://infoweb-newsbank-com.ezproxy.baylor.edu/apps/news/document-view?p=AWNB&docref=news/13DBF93E8B60A8A0>.

on dominance and athletic performance once the team continued to win. This phenomenon also occurred in the 2004-2005 season, with media coverage increasing in quality and enthusiasm as the team continued to win. On the other hand, in the seasons that followed the 1997-1998 season, media coverage became significantly more critical and less descriptive when the women's basketball team was struggling to win.

Finally, I must note how much of the coverage in this season was focused on Brittney Griner and how the majority of the descriptive language used was in reference to her. Nearly every article discussed her as the focus of games won, and even separate articles were exclusively devoted to her experience, background, and future in the sport. This does not mean that the importance of the team as a whole was overlooked. On the contrary, Cherry acknowledged that "Griner [was] but a piece of the vexing jigsaw puzzle that is beating Baylor,"²⁹ and the importance of the rest of the team was emphasized in several articles. For example, Cherry wrote a story titled "Lady Bears' title quest could hinge on Madden, Hayden," emphasizing those players' key roles in the success of the team.³⁰ Additionally, in another article, Cherry exclaimed how the team "oozed so much returning talent that the managers needed extra towels just to soak up the spillover."³¹ Nevertheless, the increased attention Griner's presence demanded in the media adheres to the idea that anomalies to traditional definitions of "female" and "athlete" such as

²⁹ Brice Cherry, "Baylor Lady Bears are Swatting Everyone's Best Shot." *Waco Tribune-Herald (TX)*, March 20, 2012. *NewsBank: Access World News*. <https://infoweb-newsbank-com.ezproxy.baylor.edu/apps/news/document-view?p=AWNB&docref=news/13DA0041C1EA0550>.

³⁰ Brice Cherry, "Lady Bears' Title Quest Could Hinge on Madden, Hayden." *Waco Tribune-Herald (TX)*, March 30, 2012. *NewsBank: Access World News*. <https://infoweb-newsbank-com.ezproxy.baylor.edu/apps/news/document-view?p=AWNB&docref=news/13DD4B581159F0B8>.

³¹ Cherry, SEASON IN REVIEW

Brittney draw increased media attention.³² Again, this is similar to what appears in the 2004-2005 season; however, Brittney's height emphasized the effect even more. With the ongoing debate regarding if women's sports themselves are worth attention, Brittney Griner became something unique that made the women's games worth covering because she was somebody who defied expectations and traditional perceptions of female athletes. Thus, the trends in the coverage of the Baylor Women's Basketball Team this season are consistent with predictions made based on previous research, but one can't help but wonder what this season and the resulting media coverage would have been like without the outlier of Brittney's presence. However, I can only speculate on such things, as there are many factors that contribute to the type of coverage the Baylor Women's Basketball Team receives in the *Trib* each year.

Brice Cherry, who has been a sportswriter for the *Trib* since 1998 and has served as the sports editor since 2012, can attest to the variety of factors that influence how stories are written for the *Trib*. Cherry was also the beat writer for the Baylor Women's Basketball Team from 2008 to 2012, and he was kind enough to give his perspective on covering Baylor women's basketball during that time. Cherry stated that in coverage of the women's team he simply tried to find the most interesting story. Cherry said that this meant he would "sometimes focus on athleticism and what they [did] as a player, but sometimes [it was] just as interesting to focus on who they are as a person." Cherry said he enjoyed featuring and profiling different athletes on a personal level based on their interests or on stories surrounding them in the media. He recalls covering players'

³² Creedon, "Women, Media and Sport"

interests in art as well as the social media hate Brittney Griner had attracted, and Griner being the best shot blocker in women's basketball history. For Cherry, it was important to "balance the human-interest component" with the sports coverage fans wanted to read.

Additionally, the story may also be shaped by the players themselves. Cherry noted how it was easier to form a story on some athletes than others based on how easy they were to interview and how much they opened up to him.

Cherry admitted that the team's success influenced his coverage, "Absolutely. You can't help but do that." Cherry explained how it was more fun to cover winning teams in general. At the same time, during the height of the Baylor Women's Program's success, it became harder for him to find new and interesting ways to cover games. "Ok they're rolling out the ball and they're going to beat this poor helpless opponent by 35-40 points. How do I make this different and interesting?" Cherry would often have to ask himself. This domination of one team is not uncommon in women's college basketball, as a handful of teams frequently dominate the rest of the competition. However, his coverage for the 2012 season got progressively more descriptive as the season progressed and the team continued to win. Thus, it is possible the addition of descriptive language was a conscious choice to deliberately compensate for Cherry's fear of stories being repetitive and boring. Nevertheless, 2012 was a special time for the Baylor Women's Basketball Team as they saw unprecedented media interest and equitable focus on their athleticism and dominance.

Findings from 2018-2019 Season

The most recent championship for the Baylor Women's Basketball Program was in the 2018-2019 season. Findings from this season showed that appearance was one of

the main focuses, as trivial details such as hairstyle were also included in articles. Didi Richards specifically “sport[ed] pigtailed on the court” or had “her hair pulled back in a low ponytail that was braided.”³³ These details of appearance, take away from commentary that could be spent on Richards’ abilities. However, emphasis was placed on dominance and skill across the season as well. Baylor was continuously dubbed a “Perennial power” and a “number 1 overall seed” with the “top recruiting class in the country.”³⁴ They played “suffocating defense,” and “stifled the competition.”³⁵ This team was also noted to be a particularly fast team, known for putting on “fast break clinics” and being “quick off the dribble.”³⁶

Attributes such as aggression and athleticism aside from speed (such as strength or power) were still some of the lowest categories highlighted. However, in this instance that may simply be because there was so much else to talk about. The *Trib* sportswriters Krista Pirtle and Chad Connie acknowledged that while the players did struggle in some games, they were fierce competitors whose “offensive fireworks,” speed, and hustle, made them a team that often “couldn’t be stopped.”³⁷ Indeed, when taken in isolation, the

³³ Krista Pirtle, "Lady Bears Ready for First Exhibition of 2018-19 Season." *Waco Tribune-Herald (TX)*, October 26, 2018: 6B. *NewsBank: Access World News*. <https://infoweb-newsbank-com.ezproxy.baylor.edu/apps/news/document-view?p=AWNB&docref=news/16F4B7C5153D9388>.

³⁴ Chad Connie, "Lady Bears Dominate Abilene Christian in First Round Game." *Waco Tribune-Herald (TX)*, March 24, 2019: 1D. *NewsBank: Access World News*. <https://infoweb-newsbank-com.ezproxy.baylor.edu/apps/news/document-view?p=AWNB&docref=news/1725F83788DDD620>.

³⁵ Connie, "Lady Bears Dominate Abilene Christian."

³⁶ Krista Pirtle, "No. 2 Baylor Looks to Stop Strong Guard Play of KU." *Waco Tribune-Herald (TX)*, January 16, 2019: 1B. *NewsBank: Access World News*. <https://infoweb-newsbank-com.ezproxy.baylor.edu/apps/news/document-view?p=AWNB&docref=news/170FC0C9E4BDA7A8>.

³⁷ Krista Pirtle, "Lady Bears Hot, Cold on Way to Win Lady Bears Have a Tale of Two Halves Against Southern." *Waco Tribune-Herald (TX)*, November 16, 2018: 1B. *NewsBank: Access World News*. <https://infoweb-newsbank-com.ezproxy.baylor.edu/apps/news/document-view?p=AWNB&docref=news/16FBA83DD80B22D8>. ; Krista Pirtle, "Lady Bears Focused on Return

type of coverage found in the articles from this season were detailed, descriptive, and covered relevant topics to emphasize the players' legitimacy as athletes, which shows vast improvement in coverage content and quality from the rest of the seasons.

It is insightful to look at the language used in this season versus the other seasons I've analyzed. In general, more descriptive language was used in the 2018-2019 season than any before it I analyzed with the exception of the 2011-2012 season with standout Britney Griner. Additionally, the players' athleticism and dominance continued to be celebrated as it had been in 2012.

Looking at the coverage of the 2018-2019 season alone, media coverage appears to be equitable and to place emphasis on the players' dominance and speed. However, my second analysis that compares the language used in articles about the Baylor women's team with the language used in articles about the Baylor men's team shows inequities still exist.

ATLAS.ti and Comparison to Men's Coverage

When studied in isolation, the *Trib* articles covering the women's basketball team seemed to provide equitable coverage that focused on the players' athleticism; however, findings from the second phase of analysis, comparison to men's coverage using ATLAS.ti software, confirmed that disparities between men's and women's coverage still exist. Findings are consistent with current research of a shift from overt sexism to

Home, Lady Bears Focused on 'Fixing Us' in Return Home." *Waco Tribune-Herald (TX)*, November 15, 2018: 1B. *NewsBank: Access World News*. <https://infoweb-newsbank-com.ezproxy.baylor.edu/apps/news/document-view?p=AWNB&docref=news/16FB544E8D5FCC30>. ; Krista Pirtle, "No. 4 Baylor Lady Bears Run Away From St. Francis." *Waco Tribune-Herald (TX)*, November 9, 2018: 1B. *NewsBank: Access World News*. <https://infoweb-newsbank-com.ezproxy.baylor.edu/apps/news/document-view?p=AWNB&docref=news/16F956338DA13260>.

“gender-bland sexism” in which the coverage of female athletes, while not outright discriminatory, still does not equitably compare with that of male athletes.³⁸ The seasons analyzed in the present study remain consistent with the findings from previous research, as the articles written about the men’s team routinely contained more descriptive language as well as more dominant language than articles written about the women’s team.

In the 2011-2012 season, while more descriptive language in adjectives was used to describe women’s players both in variety and frequency compared to men’s players (women: 403 different adjectives in 1394 instances; men: 222 different adjectives in 857 instances), significantly less of the descriptive language used suggested women’s players dominance.³⁹ Dominant language was characterized as language that went beyond verbiage simply retelling the actions done (such as “she made the shot” or “they won the game”) to paint a clear picture of power and unmatched skill. Examples of dominant language include she “nailed the shot”, “buried the three”, “posterized the opponent,” or “erupted that night.” Findings showed that although there was a wider variety of dominant verbs used in coverage of the women’s teams, that dominant language was not used as frequently as in coverage of the men’s teams, as female athletes were characterized as dominant only half as many times as their male counterparts.

Similar results are found in the 2018-2019 season, though the discrepancies are even more shocking. Looking at verbs from the men’s 2018-2019 season, there were 17 different words that could be classified as dominant. These dominant words were used a

³⁸ Musto et al, “From Fizzle to Sizzle”

³⁹ See table 1

total of 231 times across articles from that season. For the women’s articles, while a similar number of dominant words were present (19), the words were used far less at only 67 uses total. That means that despite having more articles written that season *and* winning the national championship, (while the men were eliminated in the second round of the NCAA tournament that same year), in local media coverage the women’s players were still conveyed as dominant almost 3.5 times less than the men’s players.⁴⁰

Table 1: Comparison of Descriptive Language in the *Waco Tribune-Herald* for Baylor’s Men’s and Women’s Basketball Teams’ 2018-2019 Season

Team	Number of Adjectives Used	Instances Adjectives Were Used	Number of Dominant Verbs Used	Instances Dominant Verbs Were Used
2011-2012				
Women	403	1394	68	253
Men	222	857	60	380
2018-2019				
Women	583	8521	19	67
Men	535	4192	17	231

Brice Cherry did not believe there were any differences in specific language used in covering the men’s and women’s games, but that there were occasionally stories that were more specific to the women’s game and challenges they faced as athletes. It is important to note that while I analyzed the coverage of the Baylor Women’s Basketball Team in comparison with the men’s, the *Waco Trib* is an independent media outlet not beholden to Title IX, meaning equal coverage of women’s teams is not mandated. “You don’t have to cover anything equally at all” says Cherry; however, he does still try to provide equitable coverage to the women’s games because “it’s still basketball.”

⁴⁰ See Table 1

However, as analysis of Baylor’s media coverage in their three national championship seasons shows, inequities in coverage still exist, and it is important to understand why language differences, even subtle ones, in media coverage are important. The implications for women in sport include influence on how athletes think about themselves. As women’s and gender studies scholar, Kirsten Hextrum, notes, when athletes see themselves portrayed a certain way, they are more likely to act in accordance with how they believe they are portrayed.⁴¹

Sophia Young, a two-time All American and 2005 National Champion with the Baylor Women’s Basketball Team and current Assistant Athletic Director for Player Development at Baylor, knows the impact media coverage can have on an athlete. In an interview for this project, Young explained how she personally learned early on not to pay attention to media, as when things were good and the team was winning, coverage was great, but when the team lost, coverage was unpleasant and negative. “When you read those posts that are not so pleasant, it can become very depressing. For me personally, as an athlete, I learned a long time ago not to pay attention to the media.” From a mental health standpoint, Young said she didn’t want to be influenced by what the media was saying about her. “I didn’t want to be frustrated by other people’s opinions.” However, while Young was wary of the personal toll media coverage could take on her mental health, she also believed it helped her team and career. “I believe that I was being featured in a positive way. I didn’t feel that enough attention wasn’t given to me. I felt that me, our team, were given all the attention that was necessary” and “I think

⁴¹ Kirsten Hextrum, “Bigger, Faster, Stronger: How Racist and Sexist Ideologies Persist in College Sports,” *Gender and Education* 32, no. 8 (November 16, 2020): 1053–71, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09540253.2019.1632418>.

that the media coverage for me helped me tremendously in getting drafted to the WNBA.” Thus, as Young’s experiences highlight, media coverage can drastically have an impact on athletes’ mental health and career trajectories.

In addition to influencing how athletes view themselves, the media also influences how members of the public view athletes. By covering particular topics, the media tells consumers what to think about, and by framing the topics in a certain way, the media also tells consumers how to think about them.⁴² For example, the subtle “othering” of women in sports by emphasizing gender differences in athleticism reinforces maleness as the default and gives female athletes the “asterix of ‘woman’” next to their name, so that they will always be perceived as the best *female* athlete, but never simply the best athlete.⁴³ The continued reinforcement of maleness as the yardstick from which to measure athletic performance results in, as Musto et al posit, the “symbolic annihilation of women’s sports,” as the differences emphasized in coverage creates a division between women’s and men’s sports and reinforces ideas of women being inferior athletes to men.⁴⁴ With clear influence on both what we think and how we think about it, media as a whole serves an immensely influential role in forming society’s attitudes about a variety of topics, and due to the prominent status of sports in society, sports media’s influence in particular is incredibly powerful in forming societal attitudes.

⁴² Musto et al, “From Fizzle to Sizzle”; Fink, “Have We Really “Come a Long Way, Baby”?”; Robin L. Nabi and Mary Beth Oliver, eds. *The SAGE handbook of media processes and effects*. Sage, 2009.

⁴³ Hextrum, “Bigger, Faster, Stronger”

⁴⁴ Musto et al, “From Fizzle to Sizzle”

Sports in America make up a multi-billion-dollar industry. With money comes power, and as a result, sport has the power to both *influence* and *reflect* the values of society at large.⁴⁵ According to Althusserian ideology, individuals figure out how the world works through what they see represented around them and through how they interact with the social world.⁴⁶ Due to the prevalence of sport in society, much of what people see in the world around them is related to sports and what the media presents about sports. Even people who do not actively follow sports cannot escape seeing news about the Super Bowl, March Madness, or the Olympics, for example. Thus, by being inundated by sports content, sports media coverage greatly influences how people see the world in a variety of ways. First, the very division of sports by gender, which is common and accepted in society, serves to highlight gender as an important divisive factor. Additionally, because traditional sports contests value qualities traditionally associated with masculinity, such as physicality, strength, and aggression, the value of masculinity is reinforced as are biological differences between males and females.⁴⁷ By emphasizing the importance of traditionally masculine qualities to succeed in athletics, male athletes and consumers of sports media learn that “playing like a girl” is one of the worst things they can do if they wish to be successful in their sport or taken seriously as an athlete. This discourages traits seen to be traditionally feminine, which further denigrates the status and legitimacy of female athletes.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Musto et al, “From Fizzle to Sizzle”

⁴⁶ Hextrum, "Bigger, Faster, Stronger”

⁴⁷ Musto et al, “From Fizzle to Sizzle”; Hextrum, "Bigger, Faster, Stronger”

⁴⁸ Fink, "Hiding in Plain Sight.”

While sports media has traditionally reinforced gender discriminatory stereotypes, addressing the continued gap in quality of coverage for female athletes is important because sports are so interconnected with life and culture in our country, that allowing sexism to go uncontested in sport allows similar attitudes to prevail in places beyond sport as well. By the same token, fighting sexism in sport could have a great influence on ending sexism in other realms of society. Colleges and universities are unique players in this problem, as they have control over their athletic programs, but are legally bound by Title IX to treat women's sports equally.⁴⁹

One such example of the power university personnel hold in changing sport is the influence of Baylor's Coach Kim Mulkey. Mulkey took over as coach for the Baylor Women's Basketball Team in 2000 and was instrumental in transforming the program to one of the most successful dynasties in women's college basketball. Before her decision to leave Baylor in 2021, Mulkey led the Baylor Women's Basketball Program to 12 Big 12 Championships and 3 National Championships. Her influence was always evident on the court, but in analyzing the *Trib* coverage for each season, I realized how much impact she had in the media as well. All seasons incorporated quotes from Coach Mulkey to emphasize the team's skill and success. As a result, what Mulkey chose to speak about influenced both reporters and readers on where attention should be focused. If Mulkey claimed the team looked really fast that night, that's what would get included in the article. If Mulkey said the team looked a little sloppy that night, that's what would be included.

⁴⁹ Hextrum, "Bigger, Faster, Stronger"

Lori Fogleman, Baylor's Assistant Vice President of Media and Public Relations who formerly served as a color commentator for the radio broadcast team for the Baylor Women's Basketball Team from 1998-2018, similarly noticed how the Baylor women's coach's perspective can change the way media views and covers Baylor's game. Fogleman stated that when Coach Nicki Collen took over from Mulkey in 2021, it changed the way she thought about the game, as she was able to see the different concepts Collen described on the court, making it a different type of game for her to watch compared to when Mulkey coached.

Derek Smith, Baylor's Assistant Director of Research Communications and Play-by-Play Announcer for Baylor Women's Basketball, also saw how coaches impact the game, as his coverage typically differed depending on the team's culture or major events surrounding the team for a particular year. Smith explained how when Mulkey coached, the focus was on doing the same thing right every time, and that was what he emphasized. However, when coach Collen took over, it became much more about developing specific game plans for individual opponents, and he tried to highlight these plans in his coverage.

In addition to Baylor's coaches' influences, Baylor's media team also has the power to influence stories in the media. Colin Pirtle, the interim Associate Director of Communications for the Baylor Women's Basketball Team explained how Baylor has control over which media requests are granted: "Media will contact us with an informal pitch, basically, where they spell out who they want to talk to and why. We either grant that request and begin arranging a time or pointing them towards our media availabilities that we host weekly while in season." On the other hand, Pirtle explained how he can also

go to the media with stories Baylor wishes to publish. “If it’s been relatively dry, we can and do pitch storylines to our media partners to see if they would want to get a story out on the specific topic.”

Amount of Coverage

Previous research has found that another form of subtle discrimination towards women in sport is less coverage, and that even when coverage is praiseworthy and free of discrimination, there is a lack of it to be found. In the present study, I analyzed the amount of coverage the women’s basketball team received in two ways. First, I looked at the length of the articles written by averaging word counts for each article across the seasons. Second, I analyzed the number of articles written in each season, counting articles written from the date of the first game to the date of the last game. Then, I compared trends in both of these domains across the three seasons the Baylor Women’s Basketball Team won the NCAA National Championship. Finally, I compared the media coverage the women’s basketball team received during its most recent championship season (2018-2019) to the media coverage the men’s team received that same year.

In terms of word count, the 2004-2005 season’s articles averaged 674 words per story. There was a slight increase in this average during the 2011-2012 season when stories reached averages of 763 words per story. Finally, in the 2018-2019 season, this trend continued as articles averaged 898 words.⁵⁰ Thus, there is a general increase in story length progressing chronologically through the seasons toward the present day.

Regarding number of articles, for the 2004-2005 season, 110 articles were written about the women’s basketball team during their 38-game season, which ended in a 35-3

⁵⁰ See Table 2

win-loss record. In the 2011-2012 season, there were a similar number of stories run, as the *Trib* published 105 articles for the women’s 40-game undefeated season. There was a drastic decline in the number of articles written in the 2018-2019 season, however, as only 62 articles were written for the Lady Bear’s 38-game season, just over half as many as were written in 2004-2005 or 2011-2012.⁵¹

Table 2: Amount of Coverage in the *Waco Tribune-Herald* for the Baylor Women’s Basketball Team’s National Championship Seasons

Season	Word Count	Number of Stories Written	Games Played	Season Win-Loss Record
2004-2005	674	110	38	35-5
2011-2012	763	105	40	40-0
2018-2019	898	62	38	37-1

One possible reason for at least some of this discrepancy is that several articles published by the *Trib* during the 2011-2012 season focused on Brittney Griner. Her presence and the attention she attracted likely added to the stories written and topics covered that year, which could explain some of the gap in 2018-2019. However, it is hard to believe that her absence can fully account for the 43 fewer articles written in 2018 than in the previous championship season. Additionally, Griner was also not a factor in the 2004-2005 season, which published the most articles of any season I examined and at a similar level to the 2011-2012 season. Therefore, the increased success of the men’s basketball teams may also play a role. In 2004, Baylor Men’s Basketball team was facing the repercussions of major scandals – a player was murdered by a former teammate and the head coach was found to be in violation of NCAA financial rules. As a result, the team was placed on scholarship limitations for two years and a postseason ban for the

⁵¹ See Table 2

2004-2005 year. Given the men's team's limited game time action and the negative attention such scandal brought to the university, the women's team's success on a national stage was probably a welcome relief for the *Trib* sportswriters to cover. The 2012 season was a historic season for the men's team with the longest winning streak in program history, bringing competition for the sportswriters to cover both Baylor's men's and women's teams, which could explain the slight decline in coverage compared with the 2004-2005 season. However, the 2018-2019 season was not particularly successful for the men's team as they did not make it to the NCAA Tournament, so it does not seem adequate to explain the dramatic decline in coverage for the women's team from 2012 to 2018.

Another hypothesis is that writers potentially subconsciously compensate for the increased article lengths in each season by decreasing the number of stories, as, if they write more comprehensive and longer stories, they feel no need to devote several stories to one topic or may feel they have no more new material to devote a separate story to, having covered everything of importance already. By this logic, because the *Trib's* stories on the Baylor Women's Basketball Team were longer in 2018-2019, the sportswriters may have felt no need to write as many stories as years prior. Ultimately though, I do not know why we see such a gap in the number of articles published in 2018-2019, but it is an incredibly interesting lack of coverage.

For the most recent season I examined (2018-2019), the number of articles published for the women's team is still less than for the men's team. The *Trib* ran 62 stories on the women's team that year and 71 stories for the men's team. Additionally, the stories for the women's team also had shorter word counts on average, with stories

averaging 898 words for the women and 1092 words for the men.⁵² It is important to note that the women still received fewer articles written about them despite playing in 4 more games that season and winning the national championship, while the men were eliminated in round two of the NCAA tournament. Thus, despite having more opportunities for stories to be published and increased success compared to their male counterparts, findings here align with prior studies suggesting women still receive less coverage than male athletes, despite proving their worthiness of coverage and boasting success on the court.

Table 3: Comparison of Amount of Coverage in the *Waco Tribune-Herald* for 2018-2019 Season

Team	Average Word Count	Number of Stories Written	Games Played	Season Win-Loss Record
Women's Team	898	62	38	37-1
Men's Team	1092	71	34	20-14

The lack of media coverage female athletes continue to receive further illustrates how change toward fully valuing women's sports in the general public is hard. Furthermore, given the progress made toward equality in recent years, some hold the post-feministic belief that sexism in sport no longer exists or requires attention. As a result, "gender-blind sexism" forms, which assumes that instances of sexism seen in sport are not a product of outdated societal views on women but are due to individual biases and acts of discrimination from a person who is not in line with society's values.⁵³ As a result, sexism in sport is often downplayed and brushed away as an individual issue

⁵² See Table 3

⁵³ Musto et al, "From Fizzle to Sizzle"

rather than a societal issue. While my analysis shows that women's athletic success can increase their media coverage and also change the way they are covered, despite the dynasty-like success of the Baylor women's Basketball Program and with different people narrating the coverage, inequities persist. The discrimination evident in this study is not an isolated incident, but a systemic problem within the institution of sport.

Summary

To summarize the content analysis themes identified over time, local media coverage of the 1997-98 season focused on physical skills and team cooperation and chemistry, with little emphasis on players' speed, athleticism, or power. Coverage for 2004-2005 focused on appearance, background, and skill. Coverage for 2011-2012 emphasized dominance, determination, personality, and athleticism, and coverage for 2018-2019 highlighted dominance, skill, and appearance.

Looking at the specific language for the entirety of the seasons analyzed, the use of descriptive language increased from the 2004-2005 season to the 2011-2012 season; however, in 2018-2019 there is a slight decline from the 2012 levels of descriptive language, though they remain more than what they were in the 2004-2005 season.

There is no clear trend for verbs suggesting dominance across the seasons, with 2004-2005 showing the highest frequency of dominant verbiage employed. 2011-2012 showed a lower frequency of dominant language, although a greater variety of language was used, and while 2018-2019 saw the same number of dominant verbs employed, they were used significantly less frequently than in 2004-2005 but more frequently than in 2011-2012.

Gender-marking was also still prominent across all seasons studied, as the women's basketball team was routinely referred to as the *Lady* Bears and mentions of the *women's* championship or being best in the *women's* game were frequent. Universities referring to their women's athletic programs as "Lady" is common in women's sports, and Baylor Women's Basketball Team has been referred to in this way since the seventies. However, this form of gender-marking continues to separate the Baylor women's team as "other," and designate them not as Baylor's team, but Baylor's *women's* team. For this reason, Baylor Women's Basketball decided to remove "Lady" in their name in 2021 to be more consistent with the rest of Baylor's athletic programs' nomenclature.⁵⁴

The use of metaphors to compare successful women to men were common in all seasons I analyzed. For example, Brice Cherry's 2012 article discussing Pat Summit's contributions and influence on basketball described her as "to women's basketball what Elvis was to rock 'n' roll."⁵⁵ Additionally, a 2018 article by Chad Connie claimed a team needed the "women's college basketball equivalent of Hakeem Olajuwon and Ralph Sampson" to have a chance at making shots in the paint against Brittney Griner.⁵⁶ Such practices continue to suggest that the ultimate example of success is a man and allows the media to unconsciously perpetuate stereotypes of men being more dominant, powerful,

⁵⁴ Wilton Jackson, "Baylor Women's Basketball Removes 'Lady' from Team Name." September 2021. <https://www.si.com/college/2021/09/04/baylor-womens-basketball-removes-lady-team-name>.

⁵⁵ Cherry, "Summits Possible Swan Song Shrouds Lady Bears' Path"

⁵⁶ Chad Connie, "Same Old Story: Lady Bears Expect ACU to Let the 3-Ball Fly in NCAA Tournament Opener." *Waco Tribune-Herald (TX)*, March 23, 2019: *NewsBank: Access World News*. <https://infoweb-newsbank-com.ezproxy.baylor.edu/apps/news/document-view?p=AWNB&docref=news/1725A3DF487999F8>.

and successful than women, thus, minimizing the power and skill of female athletes and coaches.

Finally, while I found increases in the lengths of stories run from 2004 to 2019, suggesting women were afforded more coverage, I found an almost counterbalancing effect in the decrease in the number of stories. While the average length of the articles for each championship season moderately increased from season to season, the number of articles written from the 2011-2012 to 2018-2019 season declined dramatically. The lack of articles written for the 2018-2019 season is especially astonishing because the team played the same number of games as they did in 2004-2005 and the seasons ran for about the same length of time, 5 months. Given the progress made towards equality for women and support of women in sports within the past twenty years, I expected to see the highest amount of coverage in the 2018-2019 season, yet my results suggest my hypothesis was not supported.

In this chapter I argued how Baylor Women's Basketball's success influences both the quantity and content of media coverage the athletes receive. However, while the success of the Baylor Women's Basketball Team led to dominance being emphasized across the decade in some form or fashion, the language used to describe female athletes is still not on par with the language used to describe male athletes in terms of intensity and variety. Furthermore, the Baylor Women's Basketball Team still receives less local media attention than the Baylor Men's Basketball Team. Ultimately though, understanding the type of language used in media coverage is only one piece of the puzzle related to equity in sport. In order to better see the whole picture of female

athletics, specifically women's basketball, at Baylor, I now turn to other measures of difference such as program funding, attendance, and season ticket sales.

CHAPTER THREE

Other Measures of Difference: Program funding, Attendance, and Season Ticket Sales

In addition to the media coverage female athletes receive, research has also identified other forms of discrimination common in women's sports, including disparities in funding, game attendance, and ticket sales.¹ For years, the rationale behind this discrimination was that nobody was interested in watching women's athletics. Women were not perceived as capable of succeeding in sports because what society thought it meant to be a great athlete directly contradicted what it meant to be a woman. Thus, women's athletic participation was minimized, and women that were allowed to compete did so with limited support, such as using hand-me-down equipment, playing schedules with really early or late games, and paying their own way to competitions.² Women fought for years to receive equal treatment; however, little came of their struggles. Eventually, leaders decided that more was evidently needed to spur the movement along, as "if changing the structure on college campuses to guarantee equity in athletics for women was left up to the good will of those in the power positions, those changes would come very slowly."³ When Title IX was signed in 1972, everything changed. Those

¹ Emma Baccellieri, "The Many Shining Disparities Between Men's and Women's College Basketball," *Sports Illustrated*, April 19, 2021, <https://www.si.com/college/2021/04/19/daily-cover-womens-tournament-equality-initiative-daily-cover..>; Kaplan, Hecker, & Fink, "Report - NCAA Gender Review," 2021. <https://ncaagenderequityreview.com>.

² Nancy Ruth Goodloe, *Before Brittney: A Legacy of Champions*. Victoria, BC: Friesen Press, 2014.

³ Goodloe, *Before Brittney*

“thirty-seven words that changed American sports”⁴ led to increased participation rates for women in college athletics and guaranteed equal treatment by educational institutions.

The legislation 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.⁵

While these words were a promising step towards equity for women in college sports, change did not occur overnight. For years, what exactly constituted discrimination and equality was hotly debated. Many skeptics thought the inclusion of women’s sports would ruin college athletics by taking funds and resources away from popular men’s sports. Baylor also doubted the merit of adding women’s sports, with early administrators pushing back on the implementation of Title IX as an infringement on religious liberties. Nonetheless, Title IX stands, and a general consensus has been reached for judging institutional compliance with the legislation. Today, it is required that any institution receiving federal funding must remain in compliance with Title IX. Compliance is measured by institutions meeting at least one of the following three criteria: ⁶

- 1) Financial aid or scholarships given to athletes must be proportionate to the participation rate of each sex in the institution’s intercollegiate athletic programs.
- 2) There must be relatively equal opportunities for participation for male and female athletes. Institutions bound by Title IX can show equality of opportunity either by

⁴ Susan Ware, *IX: A Brief History with Documents*. Waveland Press, 1, 2014.

⁵ US Department of Education, “Title IX and Sex Discrimination.” Home. US Department of Education (ED), (August 20, 2021). https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/tix_dis.html.

⁶ Billie J. King, “What Is Title IX?,” Women’s Sports Foundation, accessed April 3, 2023, <https://www.womenssportsfoundation.org/advocacy/what-is-title-ix/>.

offering opportunities for athletic participation in proportion to the total number of undergraduate students in the institution or by showing a history and continuous effort to expand participation rates to meet the needs and interests of female athletes.⁷

- 3) There must be equal treatment in men's and women's program components. Program components include items such as facility and equipment access, scheduling of games and practices, publicity, coaching, academic support, and travel expenses.⁸

The criteria for compliance with Title IX are undeniably vague and allow programs and universities flexibility. However, those in power agreed there had to be some universal way to check compliance. Thus, the Equity in Athletics Disclosure Act (EADA) was passed in 1993, which required universities with intercollegiate athletic programs to publish yearly reports to the Department of Education regarding their "athletic participation, staffing, and revenues and expenses, by men's and women's teams."⁹ While the reports give data on each sport individually as well as in aggregate, compliance is based on the entirety of the athletic program, such that while certain women's sports may show discrepancies in funding compared to their men's sport counterparts, a school is

⁷ US Department of Education, "Equal Opportunity In Intercollegiate Athletics: Requirements Under Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972," Pamphlets; Laws (US Department of Education (ED), January 10, 2020), <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/interath.html>; Blair Paulakovich. "Title IX Information & Resources." Women Leaders in College Sports. 2022 <https://www.womenleadersincollegesports.org/WL/Resources/title-ix.aspx>.

⁸ King, "What is Title IX?"

⁹ US Department of Education, "Equity in Athletics Disclosure Act," Survey Data; Data Collection Instruments; Databases; Datasets (US Department of Education (ED), June 11, 2020), <https://www2.ed.gov/finaid/prof/resources/athletics/eada.html>.

still judged to be in compliance if the women's athletic sports receive equal financial resources and treatment overall.¹⁰ This allows male and female programs to differ slightly based on athlete ability and interest.¹¹ In this chapter, I show how Baylor differs in the funding allocated to men's and women's sports for recruitment, operating expenses, financial aid, and coaching salaries. Additionally, while the success of the Baylor Women's Basketball Program has helped bring the spending on the women's team closer to that of the men's team, they still receive fewer financial resources than their male counterparts.

This chapter looks at the EADA reports from Baylor during the years the Baylor Women's Basketball Team won the NCAA National Championship – 2005, 2012, and 2019. Baylor's reports include roster size, recruiting budget, scholarship allocation, coaching salaries, and expenses and revenue for each sport. In this chapter, I compare data for all of Baylor's men's and women's programs combined; however, I also look at comparisons strictly between the men's and women's basketball teams for those selected years. While any discrepancies found solely between the two basketball programs do not automatically equate to Baylor not being in compliance with Title IX, such findings still provide useful insight into how the women's basketball team is treated at Baylor, as well as how the program's success has helped to bridge the gap between men's and women's athletic equity. Finally, I examine season ticket sales and average attendance numbers for both the men's and women's basketball teams to show how success influenced community support.

¹⁰ King, "What is Title IX?"

¹¹Ibid.

2004-2005

For the 2004-2005 academic year, Baylor had 142 total female athletes making up 34% of the athlete population while 275 male athletes made up the remaining 66%.

While there were significantly more male athletes involved in sports at Baylor, Baylor offered 8 athletic teams for women to participate in (basketball, softball, track, equestrian, golf, tennis, soccer, and volleyball) and 6 for men (basketball, baseball, track, football, golf, and tennis), showing proportionate opportunities for participation for both sexes, and meeting criteria 2 for Title IX compliance. Proportional to their participation, female athletes received 38% of athletically related financial aid, also signifying Baylor met criteria 1 for compliance with Title IX.

In terms of overall expenses afforded to the women's programs, about \$1.5 million more was spent on women's teams than men's teams, although the women's programs brought in less than half the revenue the men's programs did. More, however, was spent on recruiting expenses for the men's teams, with budgets nearly double what was spent for the women's teams.

Looking solely at the men's and women's basketball teams in comparison, the women's basketball team brought in 1.2 times more revenue and spent 2.2 times more in operations than the men's team did that season. However, according to Baylor's Title IX compliance officer, Nancy Post, "In the rules of the EADA reporting, rather than show that as a true financial statement picture of revenues were less than expenses, they require your revenues and expenses to equal." This means that when sports expenses exceed revenue, Baylor Athletics funds the shortfall in revenue, and thus the EADA overall revenue reports show all funding as revenue whether that be from outside sales or Baylor

Athletics. Furthermore, “other than football and men’s basketball, across the country, most sports do run a deficit as an individual sport but their overall athletics department [or] university provides additional support to let them play the game” says Post. So, revenue differences on EADA reports may be due to more sales or due to increased operating needs funded by Baylor.

Finally, another area published in Baylor’s EADA reports is records of coaches’ salaries. While not directly used to judge compliance with Title IX, I thought it was extremely interesting that in comparing the average head coaching salary for coaches of men’s programs with the average head coaching salary for coaches of women’s programs, the men’s coaches were paid on average 1.5 times more than the women’s coaches. The gap was even wider for assistant coaches, as assistants for men’s teams made on average 2.2 times what assistants for women’s teams made annually. The coaches of each program do the same type and amount of work, yet the coaches of the women’s teams were consistently paid less. This is due to market demands as coaches of men’s sports typically make more than coaches of women’s sports. As a result, men’s sport coaches can ask for and expect larger salaries, and Baylor must pay those salaries to get the best coaches. Women’s sports coaches on the other hand cannot make a case for equivalent salary demands.

2011-2012

By the 2011-2012 season, there were 9 women’s sports and 6 men’s sports with the addition of acrobatics and tumbling for women and the removal of men’s golf. As a result, there was a dramatic shift in the makeup of the student-athlete population; female athletes now made up the majority 57% of the athlete population and male athletes made

up the remaining 43%. However, the proportion of aid female athletes received was no longer proportional to their participation rate, as they received only 44% of available athletically related aid while male athletes saw 56% of available aid - almost an exact proportional switch from participation rates.

Regarding expenses, about \$3 million more was spent on men's teams' gameday operating expenses than on women's teams. All Baylor's men's and women's programs spend about the same for gamedays when excluding football; however, there are 3 more sports for female athletes, which indicates that each female sport is allocated less than each male sport. Overall expenses show about \$13 million more was spent on Baylor's 6 men's teams versus 9 women's teams. Without including football expenditures, the women's programs expend about \$4 million more in total than the rest of the men's programs; however, football is included in considerations gauging Title IX compliance.

For recruiting, 1.7 times the amount of money spent on recruiting for women's teams is spent on recruiting for men's teams. Again, this increased spending on recruiting male athletes is despite there being fewer male athletes at Baylor and there being fewer men's teams to recruit players onto.

Lower spending on recruitment for women's sports may be attributed to how high-profile Division 1 recruits are for both football and men's basketball. As a result of their desirability, there may be more competition to secure recruits against other top men's programs, which thus necessitates more spending for recruitment for men's teams than women's. In addition, male athletes, particularly in football, basketball, and baseball have more opportunities to leave school early and go professional. Even Brittney Griner, recognized as one of the all-time greatest women's college basketball players, remained

at Baylor for 4 years. Consequently, men's teams may be filling more roster spots. This recruitment spending gap is likely further expanded due to the lack of competition for recruits for equestrian and acrobatics and tumbling, which provide a large percentage of Baylor's athletic opportunities for women. Only 52 other universities in the nation offer acrobatics and tumbling, and only 27 other universities offer equestrian as a sport for female athletes.¹² Due to the limited number of schools competing for athletes, there may be less reason to spend for recruitment in these sports, which brings down the total recruitment expenditures for Baylor's female athletes.

Looking solely at the two basketball programs, the women's basketball program spent about \$100,000 less than the men's basketball program, allocating about \$10,000 less per participant despite having equal participation. In terms of overall expenses, the men's basketball team spent \$2 million more than the women's basketball team. Some of this increased spending may be explained by the fact that the men played in 3 more games that year than the women due to preseason scheduling despite the women advancing farther in the playoffs than the men.

Finally, the gap in coaching salary that was present in the 2004-2005 season was still present in the 2011-2012 season. The head coaching salary was on average 3.5 times less for a head coach of a women's team than for a head coach of a men's team and the average salary of an assistant coach for a women's team was 3 times less than an assistant coach for a men's team.

¹² National Collegiate Equestrian Association, "Schools - National Collegiate Equestrian Association," accessed April 3, 2023, <https://collegiateequestrian.com/sports/2020/5/6/schools.aspx>; USA Gymnastics, "USA Gymnastics | Schools That Sponsor Acrobatics & Tumbling." 2022. <https://usagym.org/pages/home/college/atinfo.html>.

2018-2019

In the 2018-2019 academic year, there were 11 women's sports and 8 men's sports. Golf returned to Baylor men's athletics and cross country, indoor track, and outdoor track were now counted as separate sports, while they were all counted under track in the previous years. This different categorization explains the increase in 2 sports for female athletes from 2012 to 2018. The increase in female athlete participation that occurred in 2011-2012 remained, as female athletes made up 59% of the athletic population that year. The disproportionate financial aid given to those female athletes also continued, as they received only 45% of the available athletically related student aid. In contrast, male athletes made up 41% of the athletic population at Baylor yet received 54% of available athletic aid.

Looking at total program expenses, all 11 women's sports combined spent a total of just over \$27 million. In contrast, the football program alone spent almost \$31 million that same year. The rest of the 7 men's sports combined spent only \$18.8 million for the year, significantly less than what football and all female athletic programs spent. However, combining football expenses and the rest of the men's sports expenses, male athletic programs were afforded \$49.8 million to the women's \$27 million, an 84% larger budget. Additionally, solely looking at gameday operating expenses, men's programs spent over \$3 million more than women's programs. However, over half of total expenditures were spent on the football team. Take those away, and men's teams spent only \$4 million compared to the women's \$6 million.

Again, 2.5 times more money was spent on recruiting male athletes versus recruiting female athletes, despite male athletes making up a smaller percentage of the

athlete population and there being fewer male teams to recruit to. This difference confirms that for all years I examined, significantly less money was spent on recruiting female athletes. Again, the competition for recruits may be what is influencing these numbers, because in addition to the continued pressure to spend more to obtain high profile men's recruits, acrobatics and tumbling and equestrian continue to not have a lot of competition for recruits, thus necessitating little spending.

Looking only at comparisons between the men's and women's basketball teams, they have nearly equal participation and revenue, but about \$600,000 more was spent by the women's team for this year. This may likely be due to continued playoff success and expenses that come with continued hotel stays, travel, and gameday operations. The women's team played 38 games before winning the national championship this year while the men only played 34 games. However, differential spending between programs is consistent across the seasons I analyzed. Especially in the 2011-2012 and 2018-2019 season, football dominated the majority of the athletic budget, spending more than all women's sports and men's minor sports. Again, Title IX's mandate on financial equality does not necessitate the budgets for men's and women's teams be equal, they just have to allow for "proportional benefit."¹³ However, whether "proportional benefit" was able to be achieved despite the \$22 million difference in funding is something I cannot fully judge. Baylor's Nancy Post states equivalent treatment includes "standard of locker rooms, facilities, gear, all of the ancillary items that go along with being a student athlete playing a sport." For example, "we can't have one team out there that has no locker room while the other 18 sports have a locker room." As a result, Post says, "we (Baylor) can be

¹³ King, "What is Title IX?"

our best friend or worst enemy as we make upgrades to any one facility or one locker room or one whatever that benefits a sport or multiple sports. We have to look at what improvements are we also making to those same areas that other sports on our campus utilize to keep them equivalent.” Post believes Baylor is one of the best in the country in maintaining equity for women’s sports. “It’s very important to us, Baylor Athletics. We’re all vested and invested in doing this the right way. It takes all of us because any one deficiency impacts all of us.”

Finally, the gap in coaching salaries did shrink a bit, but head coaches of women’s teams were still paid 2.7 times less than head coaches for men’s teams, and assistant coaches for women’s teams were paid over 3 times less than assistants for men’s teams. This confirms that coaching salaries are significantly less for both head and assistant coaches of women’s programs than for coaches of men’s programs occurred in every season I examined. This may again be due to the fact that coaches of men’s sports typically make more everywhere, and Baylor is paying the salaries proportional to what is expected. However, paying coaches of women’s programs less suggests their work is valued less than the men’s coaches. Taken together with the lack of funding and recruiting disparities, these findings suggest to me subtle attitudes that minimize the importance of female athletes and their programs.

It is important to note that for every year examined, Baylor is in compliance with Title IX. While the differences in expenses for men’s versus women’s sports are eye-raising, Title IX does not require that budgets for men’s and women’s sports be the same, so Baylor is in no legal violation by choosing to allocate its funds the way it does. Baylor

upholds Title IX by ensuring equal opportunity for participation and from what I can tell, relatively equal treatment in program components.

Attendance and Season Ticket Sales

I conclude this section on other measures of difference between male and female athletic programs at Baylor by examining season ticket sales and average attendance numbers for both the women's and men's basketball teams.

Season ticket sales for the women's basketball team increased following the program's national championship seasons. In the two years following the 2011-2012 season, season ticket sales reached the highest they had ever been or have ever been since. Following this peak, sales dramatically declined in 2015 and the downward trend continued until the next national championship win in 2019. Again, season ticket sales increased for the season following the national championship win. However, COVID-19 hit the following year, which dramatically effected season ticket sales, and season ticket sales have remained in a downward trend in the wake of the pandemic. Initially, limited attendance due to covid was the driving factor; however, following the 2020-2021 season, long-time coach Kim Mulkey left Baylor to coach at LSU and this coaching change likely affected ticket sales as well.

Attendance for the women's games also peaks surrounding years of success. The highest average attendance numbers occurred in the season after the WNIT Finals appearance (1988-1999), the season of the first national championship and the season directly after (2004-2005, 2005-2006), and in the seasons from 2010-11 to 2013-14, when Brittney Griner played at Baylor and the program won its second national championship in 2012. Before the 2011-2012 season, the women's basketball team had

never had an advanced sellout at the Ferrell Center, but by February of that season, they had had 3.¹⁴ These three sellout games occurred when playing the University of Connecticut, Texas A&M, and Texas Tech. Both Texas A&M and Connecticut were top 5 programs, advancing many rounds deep into the national tournament that year and Texas Tech is another big school in Texas, so the rivalry and the other school's successes may have also played a factor in drawing crowds in. Clearly, Brittney's presence, the good competition, and the team's success drew people to the games more than ever before. This is consistent with previous research that shows that both the previous season's winning percentage and the reputation of the opponent predict attendance for women's college sports.¹⁵

Comparing these numbers with the men's program's, with the exception of last season (2021-2022), the women's basketball team has had higher season ticket sales each year since 2012. This increase in season ticket sales for the women coincides with increased support after success. The women's team won the national championship in 2012, and each year after that they placed first in the Big 12 Conference, and Baylor fans were excited to watch their continued success through an 11-year dominant streak. However, the shift in more season ticket sales for the men's team in 2021-2022 may be due to the coaching change for the women's team from Kim Mulkey to Nicki Collen in

¹⁴ Brice Cherry, "Lady Bears' Saturday Game vs. Tech Sold Out." *Waco Tribune-Herald (TX)*, February 17, 2012. *NewsBank: Access World News*. <https://infoweb-newsbank-com.ezproxy.baylor.edu/apps/news/document-view?p=AWNB&docref=news/13CF786D8DB43590>.

¹⁵ Erin D. Shackelford, and Christopher T. Greenwell, "Predicting Women's Division I Sports Attendance: An Analysis of Institutional Characteristics." *Sport Marketing Quarterly* 14, no. 3 (2005). <https://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/document?repid=rep1&type=pdf&doi=71bffa6915dfa24c2556076aeb27e9c0bbe43d88>.

2021 and it was also the season following the men's team winning the national championship for the 2020-2021 season. However, these yearly sales for women's season tickets show more fluctuation in the number of season tickets purchased year to year than the men's teams sales. For example, the year after the women won the national championship in 2012, season ticket sales rose by about 1000 tickets for the next year. However, in 2014, season ticket sales decreased by 1400. In contrast, the men's season ticket sales' greatest fluctuation was a decrease of 400 tickets from 2013-2014. Thus, it is possible the season ticket holder commitment depends on the success of the season more for the women's team than for the men's, as men's team support was more consistent from season to season. Additionally, despite the higher season ticket sales, the men's basketball team has had higher attendance averages since 2015. Baylor does not count student attendance separately, but the lower attendance at the women's games despite selling more season tickets in advance may be due to increased student attendance of the men's basketball games.

Both attendance and season ticket sales are heavily influenced by the women's team's success. For Baylor Women's Basketball, attendance and season ticket sales both peak following national championship wins. Attendance is also heavily influenced by the success of the opponent the Baylor women were playing, with the largest crowds occurring when playing the most skilled or highly ranked opponents. This effect was also in the men's team but was significantly less pronounced. The fact that fan support is so heavily influenced by how the women's team is doing that season is significant because that affects everything else. Without revenue drawn from ticket sales, there is less direct revenue to spend on the team, effecting recruitment, coaching salaries, and expenses.

Thus, it is important for women's teams to be successful to continue to bring in support. However, it is also hard to be successful when not given adequate funding or support, which creates a vicious cycle.

Summary

Before the passage of Title IX, there was little support for women's athletics at the collegiate level. Female athletes used hand-me-down equipment and fewer than 2% of the overall athletic budget was spent on any women's sports. Given this limited support, only 1 out of every 27 girls played any type of sport.¹⁶ Today, women's sports have seen exponential growth in support and funding, and now 2 in 5 girls play sports. In women's sports at the collegiate level, there has been an increase from 205,000 female athletes in the 1970s to 3.2 million by 2011.¹⁷

Indeed, Title IX has done great things to promote women's sports, and Baylor Women's Basketball Team provides a glimpse into Title IX's effects on one team and institution specifically. It is evident how once garnered, support for the program has grown stronger over the years. However, Title IX did not solve all problems. Change was often slow to come, and in many ways is still slow to fully occur. As highlighted by the continued gap in coaches' salaries, recruitment and operating expenses, and game attendance, Baylor women's sports are still subtly signaled as valued less than men's sports, even though Baylor follows legal requirements on equality.

¹⁶ Goodloe, *Before Brittney*, 54

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

Women continue to have to fight for equality in sport today. Many estimates show that 80-90% of all educational institutions, which are legally required to comply with Title IX in order to continue to receive federal funding, are not in compliance.¹⁸ Yet, the withdrawal of federal funding has never occurred.¹⁹ Given no real consequences for noncompliance, it is easy for institutions to continue to neglect their women's sports programs. Yet, Baylor is one of the few institutions pouring money into its female athletic programs. This I would argue is a huge factor in its women's teams' success. On the other hand, success is also a factor in equal treatment, as when a women's team is good it is able to make inroads toward equity. This is evident in Baylor Women's Basketball success; while they still face inequities, through their success they have been able to somewhat bridge gaps in treatment.

Because Baylor appears to be an outlier in treatment of its women's teams and in the success the team has been able to obtain, I now turn to an analysis of other universities within the NCAA bound by Title IX both to see how Baylor's treatment of female athletes compares and to gain a more comprehensive understanding of where equality in women's sports stands today. Through this analysis, I hope to see how the success of women's athletes affects their status in college athletics.

¹⁸ King, "What is Title IX?"

¹⁹ Ibid.

CHAPTER FOUR

Analysis Across the NCAA: How Does Baylor Compare?

After analyzing media coverage and financial reports for Baylor, I was curious how my findings at Baylor compared to other universities across the NCAA. Based on my research, I concluded that the Baylor Women's Basketball Team received less media coverage and that there were different types of language used in coverage in comparison to the Baylor Men's Basketball Team.¹ In addition, my analysis of other measures of difference at Baylor found that in regard to women's athletic programs in general, less money was spent on recruitment, operating, and coaching salaries for women's sports than men's sports.² However, in order to draw complete conclusions about what is going on at Baylor, I will compare the findings to other universities governed by Title IX with athletic programs competing in the NCAA. Doing so will allow me to determine if Baylor's treatment of its women's basketball team and other female athletic programs is unique to this institution or if the patterns I see at Baylor are common in other women's athletic programs across the country, and if so, what this implies for women's collegiate sports.

To draw such comparisons, I relied on a first-of-its-kind study conducted by *USA Today* in conjunction with the Knight-Newhouse Data project at Syracuse University.³

¹ See Chapter 1

² See Chapter 2

³ Nancy Armour, Jessica Luther, Steve Berkowitz, Kenny Jacoby, and Lindsay Schnell. "They've Had 50 Years to Figure It Out': Title IX Disparities in Major College Sports Haven't Gone Away," March

This comprehensive study analyzed revenue and expense reports for 107 public universities with athletic programs competing in the Football Bowl Subdivision of Division I NCAA competition.⁴ Researchers analyzed reports for both the 2018-2019 and 2019-2020 seasons and focused on three factors: travel, recruitment, and equipment expenses to assess equity between men’s and women’s teams at each school. Compliance with Title IX is measured across all programs, so similar programs do not need to be completely equal in spending, just equitable.⁵ A program is considered equitable by providing participants with fair and balanced treatment and opportunities. However, as Donna Lopiano, the Former CEO of Women’s Sports Foundation highlights “because schools typically devote an inordinate amount of resources to football, they then need to find other places to spend on female athletes so they can close the equity gap.” Thus, “if similar men's teams are still receiving more resources, that can reflect a difference in treatment,” which could then suggest violations of compliance with Title IX.⁶ Because all of the schools analyzed in the report belong to the football bowl subdivision of NCAA’s Division I sports, they are spending extreme amounts of money on their football programs. As a result, in order to stay in compliance with Title IX, these schools must do as Lopiano suggests and find other places to spend on female athletes. Thus, analyzing

30, 2022, <https://www.usatoday.com/in-depth/news/investigations/2022/03/30/title-ix-50th-anniversary-women-short-changed-major-college-sports/7090806001/>.

⁴ The Football Bowl Subdivision is the highest level of competition among Division I athletics in the NCAA. It is typically made up of the biggest universities across the nation that bring in the most revenue.

⁵ Billie J. King, “What Is Title IX?,” Women’s Sports Foundation, accessed April 3, 2023, <https://www.womenssportsfoundation.org/advocacy/what-is-title-ix/>.

⁶ Donna Lopiano via Armour et al, “They’ve Had 50 Years to Figure It Out.”

similar programs in how they compare across the NCAA provides insight into Title IX compliance and the state of women's college athletics across the nation because if spending is not equal across programs, it is likely the schools are not in compliance with Title IX.

Report Findings

The bulk of the report's findings indicated that, in general, for every dollar schools spent on their men's athletic teams, just 71 cents was spent on the women's athletic teams.⁷ Over the course of the two seasons analyzed in this study, that difference added up to \$125 million more spent on men's teams versus similar women's teams. Similar teams included basketball, baseball and softball, golf, soccer, swimming and diving, and tennis. However, if football were to be included in these calculations, this gap grows significantly. Given every men's sport including football, men's programs spent \$1.16 billion over the course of the two years analyzed, twice as much as the women's programs' \$576 million.

On travel alone, schools collectively spent 40% (\$77 million) more on their men's teams. At the individual school level, some teams spent over \$1 million more on travel for their men's teams than their women's teams in a season.

On equipment, schools spent nearly 40% (\$26 million) more for men's programs. Louisville, for example, spent 13 times more on equipment for its men's athletic teams

⁷ This calculation and all subsequent quantities measured are sourced from the *USA Today/Syracuse Study* unless otherwise noted.

than its women's despite having 2 more women's athletic programs than men's, which were responsible for almost exactly the same number of female athletes as male athletes.⁸

With regards to recruiting, schools spent 51%, or \$22 million, more for men's teams. One example is Indiana University, which spent \$1.2 million on its men's basketball team's recruitment, which was nearly six times more than the \$216,513 spent by the women's team on recruitment. One possible explanation is that men's programs traditionally lose more athletes each year, as it is not uncommon for stars to leave college early to pursue a professional career. As a result, men's programs may need to spend more on recruitment to fill the quicker turnaround of their athletes. Again, this may play a role, but men's teams tend to be more lavish with their spending as well. *USA Today's* detailed analysis of cost sheets for several programs showed the men's teams routinely spent hundreds of thousands of dollars on charter flights and car services for players they were recruiting, but no similar charges were found for women's teams' recruits.⁹ This is probably where the bulk of the disparity in recruitment spending lies.

Overall, Men's and Women's Basketball showed the biggest disparities across all schools. On equipment, schools collectively spent \$8.7 million more on men's teams than women's, and on recruiting, schools spent 72% more (\$19 million) on recruiting male athletes than female athletes.¹⁰

⁸ In 2019-2020, Louisville men's teams had 295 individual athletes and the women's teams had 293.; University of Louisville, *DOE EADA FY20 Survey*. University of Louisville Athletics. 2020. https://gocards.com/documents/2021/2/1/DOE_EADA_FY20_Survey.pdf?id=25769

⁹ Armour et al, "They've Had 50 Years to Figure It Out."

¹⁰ Ibid.

Scholarships

Regarding equal opportunity and scholarship availability, the *USA Today* study found that for the 2020-2021 academic year, 87% of the universities they studied were not offering proportional athletic opportunities for women.¹¹ Title IX mandates that the percentage of female athletes within the total athlete population must be equal or within a few percentage points of the percentage of female students in the entire undergraduate population. For example, if a university is made up of 50% female students, the athlete population must also contain 50% female athletes. If schools were not providing proportional opportunities for women, this means that a larger proportion of female students went to the university than there were athletic opportunities available for them. Additionally, of the over 100 universities included in the study, only 30% were compliant with Title IX's scholarship requirements, which specify that financial aid or scholarships given to athletes must be proportionate to the participation rate of each sex in the institution's intercollegiate athletic programs. Universities not being in compliance with this requirement signifies that many schools are underfunding the women's athletic programs.¹²

According to Title IX, the percentage of financial aid given to female athletes must fall within 1% of their makeup of the athlete population.¹³ For example, if female athletes make up 45% of the athlete population at a particular school, they must receive

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Kenny Jacoby, Rachel Axon, Lindsay Schnell, and Steve Berkowitz, "Female Athletes Stiffed on Scholarships at Some of the Biggest Colleges in the Country," August 17, 2022, <https://www.usatoday.com/in-depth/news/investigations/2022/08/17/female-athletes-stiffed-scholarship-money-colleges-title-ix/7640647001/>.

¹³ Jacoby et al, "Female Athletes Stiffed on Scholarships."

between 44% and 46% of the available financial aid. These requirements can occasionally be altered if the difference is due to nondiscriminatory factors such as more male athletes being from out of state and having to pay higher tuition. However, according to the study, the schools that underfunded the women's athletic programs collectively fell short by \$23.7 million in athletic scholarships in 2020-21 alone. This equates to nearly half a million more dollars needing to be spent on women's athletics per school in order to comply with Title IX.

Coaching Salaries

One major finding discussed in the previous chapter, but that was not examined in the *USA Today* study was the disparity in salaries for coaches of men's and women's sports. Consequently, I am providing a comparison. Of the top 25 highest-paid coaches across all of college sports, not a single one was a coach of a woman's sport.¹⁴ The top 25 was constituted solely of football and men's basketball coaches.¹⁵

For 2022, the highest-paid women's basketball coaches were:

- Geno Auriemma at the University of Connecticut (UCONN), who made \$2.9 million dollars that year.
- Dawn Staley at The University of South Carolina who made \$2.7 million.

¹⁴ Brad Crawford, "The 25 Highest-Paid Coaches in College Sports," accessed April 3, 2023, https://247sports.com/LongFormArticle/College-football-basketball-Nick-Saban-Mike-Krzyzewski-John-Calipari-Dabo-Swinney-highest-paid-coaches--148678887/#148678887_2.

¹⁵ Top 25 highest paid coaches in college sports 2020: 1-6 = football, 7 = men's basketball, 8-T16 = football, T16 = men's basketball, 17-24 = football, 25 = men's basketball

- Kim Mulkey, Baylor’s former women’s basketball coach, took the third spot coaching for LSU making \$2.6 million in 2022.¹⁶

The women’s basketball coaches at Connecticut and South Carolina both make more than the men’s coaches at their respective institutions. Connecticut’s men’s head coach, Dan Hurley, made \$2.75 million in 2022 and South Carolina’s Lamont Paris made \$2.2 million in 2022, though he is slated to make up to \$2.6 million within the next five years.¹⁷ LSU’s men’s coach, Matt McMahon; however, still made more than Mulkey, and was the second highest-paid coach on LSU’s staff behind the football coach, Brian Kelly, making \$2.9 million in 2022.¹⁸

The top-paid women’s coaches are all heads of historic and preeminent powers in women’s basketball with years of experience and success. For instance, Geno Auriemma has led UCONN to 11 national championships, won 8 Naismith College Coach of the Year Awards, coached the US Women’s National basketball team to win 2 gold medals, and has been inducted into the Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame and the Women’s Basketball Hall of Fame.¹⁹ Dawn Staley was the first person ever to win the

¹⁶ USA Today Sports, “Highest-Paid Women's College Basketball Coaches.” *USA Today*, Gannett Satellite Information Network, March 11, 2022, <https://www.usatoday.com/picture-gallery/sports/ncaaw/2022/03/11/highest-paid-womens-college-basketball-coaches-2021-22-season/9424678002/>.

¹⁷ Kyle Newport, “Dan Hurley, UConn Agree to 6-Year Contract; Rejects Uri, Pitt Offers.” *Bleacher Report*, Bleacher Report, April 2, 2018, <https://bleacherreport.com/articles/2765552-report-dan-hurley-uconn-agree-to-6-year-contract-rejects-uri-pitt-offers>. ; Cory Diaz. “A Look at the Details of Men's Basketball Coach Lamont Paris' Contract with South Carolina.” *The Greenville News*, Greenville News, March 24, 2022, <https://www.greenvilleonline.com/story/sports/college/usc/2022/03/24/south-carolina-gamecocks-mens-basketball-lamont-paris-contract-pay/7145644001/>.

¹⁸ Newport, “Dan Hurley, UConn Agree to 6-Year Contract”

¹⁹ “Geno Auriemma - Wikipedia.” November 6, 2018. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Geno_Auriemma.

Naismith Award as both a player and coach, coached an undefeated US Women's National Team for five years, and led South Carolina to a national championship while winning the Naismith Coach of the Year Award.²⁰ Kim Mulkey was the first person in NCAA Women's Basketball history to win a national championship as a player, assistant coach, and coach. She won three national championships as a coach at Baylor and has been inducted into both the Women's Basketball Hall of Fame and the Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame.²¹ However, the men's coaches from South Carolina and LSU are both new and in their first year of contract. It is interesting to see that while Staley and Auriemma still make more, the margin between their salary and the new men's coaches is slim despite the women's coaches' years of proven success.

The salary gap is especially prominent when comparing the highest-paid women's basketball coaches with the highest paid men's basketball coaches. The highest-paid women's college basketball coaches made just 30% of what the highest-paid men's college basketball coaches did in 2022. The highest paid men's college basketball coaches include:

- Bill Self at the University of Kansas who made \$10 million last year, was the highest-paid coach.
- John Calipari of The University of Kentucky made \$8.6 million and was the second-highest earner in men's college basketball for the year.
- Michigan State's Tom Izzo took the third-place spot, making \$8.3 million in 2022.

²⁰ "Dawn Staley - Wikipedia." August 3, 2015. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dawn_Staley.

²¹ "Kim Mulkey - Wikipedia." October 1, 2021. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kim_Mulkey.

- Baylor Men’s Basketball Coach Scott Drew was eighteenth on the list, making \$3.5 million, still more than any of the top-paid women’s basketball coaches.²²

In fact, even at the bottom of the list of salaries reported, the two coaches tied for the 37th spot still made more than the highest-paid women’s basketball coach.²³ That means 38 men’s college basketball head coaches make more in a year than Geno Auriemma, the highest-paid women’s basketball head coach.

NCAA Comparison to Baylor

Looking at each of the major categories mentioned above, it is apparent Baylor is not alone in its spending patterns. To recap my findings about Baylor from the previous chapter, Baylor spent significantly less money on recruiting female athletes in each of the three athletic seasons I analyzed despite having more female athletic teams than male athletic teams.²⁴ Additionally, women’s sports consistently received less of the athletic budget than football and other men’s sports, and coaching salaries were less for coaches of Baylor women’s teams than Baylor men’s.

Drawing comparisons regarding expenses, while there are sports and schools that spend more on their women’s teams, that appears to be the rare exception. Most schools spend millions more on their men’s teams. Furthermore, across the NCAA, basketball

²² USA Today Sports, “NCAA Men’s Basketball Highest-Paid Coaches for 2021-22 Season,” accessed April 3, 2023, <https://www.usatoday.com/picture-gallery/sports/ncaab/2022/03/11/ncaa-mens-basketball-highest-paid-coaches-2021-22-season/9424310002/>.

²³ Josh Pastner at Georgia Tech and Fran McCaffrey of Iowa both made \$3 million for the 2021-2022 season.

²⁴ 2004-2005, 2011-2012, 2018-2019

was the sport that showed the greatest disparity in budgets, with only 63 cents spent on women's programs for every \$1 spent on the men's. Baylor's EADA reports from the same years show more money was spent on the men's basketball teams as well.²⁵ However, the disparity is much less. For the 2018-2019 academic year, Baylor's spending on women's basketball was almost equal to the men's with women receiving 96 cents for every \$1 spent on the men. For the 2019-2020 academic year, the gaps broadened with women's basketball receiving 85 cents for every dollar spent on men's basketball. This is consistent with my findings that success of women's athletic teams, like Baylor Women's Basketball, helps reduce gaps and achieve equity. Regarding coaching salaries, Baylor mirrors the wider trends in the NCAA of paying coaches of women's athletic programs less than coaches of men's athletic programs, though they are still paid more than coaches of unsuccessful women's programs.²⁶ Thus, it appears the patterns of Baylor basketball are typical of the broader NCAA as well, but the success of Baylor's female athletic programs has helped to reduce the differences in spending and treatment and bring the teams closer to equity.

Common Methods to Circumvent Title IX Requirements

My research established that Baylor is not alone in devoting more money, attention, and resources to men's sports, as it is a widespread phenomenon across the NCAA. These results left me with one question: How do so many schools get away with direct noncompliance of Title IX?

²⁵ Baylor University, *EADA Annual Reports*, Baylor University Athletics, <https://baylorbears.com/sports/2018/5/16/school-bio-bay-eada-html.aspx>

²⁶ For more detailed analysis of Baylor's numbers, see chapter 2.

There are three main factors contributing to the issue: manipulation of team rosters, coaches in women's sports being unaware of the problem, and a relaxed enforcement policy.

One of the most widespread and devious ways schools avoid looking like they are violating Title IX is by manipulating their rosters to provide the illusion of more opportunity for women's athletes without actually creating more roster spots. "By packing their women's teams with extra players who never compete, double- and triple-counting women while undercounting men and even classifying male practice players as women, schools across the nation collectively conjured the illusion of thousands more female athletic opportunities, the *USA Today* investigation found."²⁷ While this may seem odd, the Department of Education, which oversees university compliance with Title IX allows for such double counting. In the *USA Today* study, discussed earlier, 52 of the 107 schools examined combined to count over 600 male practice squad players who scrimmage with their women's teams as female participants in that sport. At least 1 out of every 4 players counted as women's basketball players across the schools were actually male practice players.²⁸

In reviewing Baylor's rosters and EADA reports, I found Baylor also routinely counts male practice players as female athletes on the women's basketball team.

²⁷ Kenny Jacoby, Lindsay Schnell, Rachel Axon, Steve Berkowitz, Dan Wolken, and Nancy Armour, "Title IX Was Intended to Close the Gender Gap in College Athletics. But Schools Are Rigging the Numbers.," May 26, 2022, <https://www.usatoday.com/in-depth/news/investigations/2022/05/26/college-sports-title-ix-and-dark-illusion-gender-equity/7438716001/>.

²⁸ Male practice players are typically undergraduate students who have basketball experience and volunteer to help the women's basketball teams with practice. The use of male practice players is common across the NCAA to give women's players practice against taller, bigger competition and are typically used to simulate upcoming opponents, which allows the women to focus on their roles.

According to the EADA reports from the 2013-2014 academic year to the most recent year reported, Baylor consistently reports more than the actual participation in women's basketball. For each year from 2013 to 2022, Baylor reported between 23-40 women's basketball players as being active participants in the program, but I checked the team's rosters for each year and found that the team only ever had between 11-13 women as players on the team at a time. In compiling its reports in this way, Baylor joins hundreds of other teams across the nation in creating the illusion that there are more opportunities for female athletes than there actually are. Again, this is allowed by the Department of Education, who oversees compliance with Title IX, so schools are not doing anything they shouldn't, but it is still interesting all the same.

Some disparities in funding and resources are a result of the women's coaches being more conscious of their spending choices and choosing cheaper options than the men's coaches of their schools. As a result, they may choose to travel on coach flights or busses rather than charter flights as men's coaches often choose. However, this conscientiousness of the women's team coaches in and of itself is something of interest. According to former Notre Dame Head Coach Muffet McGraw, "women's coaches are conditioned to watch their spending."²⁹ They try to minimize their expenses by turning down resources men's coaches wouldn't even think twice about accepting. Additionally, some women's coaches may not even know that inequities exist between the treatment of their women's team and the men's team because those are not things people at the university are making them aware of, as several coaches told *USA Today*.³⁰

²⁹ Armour et al, "They've Had 50 Years to Figure It Out."

³⁰ Ibid.

Ultimately, university officials are able to rationalize the inequities as being due to “reflecting the wishes of the women’s team,” men’s teams advancing farther in the playoffs, or even due to donors strictly funneling funds into men’s sports but not women’s sports, and the cycle continues. Indeed, these were common reasons listed by universities in interviews with *USA Today*. However, as proven with Baylor, even when the women’s team advances farther in the playoffs they still may receive less of the budget. Furthermore, it is hard for spending to accurately reflect the wishes of the coaches if they are unaware of the full extent of the inequities. Had coaches known how largely they were being shortchanged in using their portion of the budget, I feel like they would be less hesitant to spend more.

Finally, a major contributor to the continued noncompliance with Title IX is the relaxed enforcement policy. While EADA reports are required to be published to try to keep schools in compliance, the records show inequities, and some recording inaccuracies are even allowed, as shown above. Furthermore, the Department of Education operates mainly on a reactive rather than a proactive basis. The Department does not continuously monitor the reports, rather it responds to complaints against particular institutions as they arise. This can be problematic as well, because as mentioned above, people may not always be aware of the inequities that are present, and as a result, they cannot make a complaint, and the inequities continue. Furthermore, even when complaints are made, punishments are not severe. While compliance with Title IX is stated as a requirement for all institutions receiving federal funding, when complaints are made and verified, schools are typically given multiple chances to correct the problems.

Summary

My research and the *USA Today* report make it clear that inequities between women's and men's sports are widespread. Violations of Title IX are common across several institutions within NCAA competition, and female athletes are consistently not receiving the resources they deserve, which perpetuates the problem. However, the silver lining is that success does have an impact in mediating the presence and effect of inequities in women's college athletics. Although Baylor and other top programs showed similar patterns of inequities towards their female athletes, the effects were less pronounced. Overall, Baylor does do a good job of remaining relatively equitable in treatment of its female and male athletes. The better the Baylor Women's Basketball team did, the more fans attended the games, the more season tickets were sold, and the more money was spent on the team. Additionally, Kim Mulkey was among the highest-paid coaches in women's college basketball during her 21-year tenure at Baylor winning 12 conference and 3 national championships. Expense reports too show less discrepancy between spending for women's and men's teams at Baylor and other top programs for recruitment, operating, and student financial aid.

While being successful helped minimize the inequities in salaries, funding, and treatment for female athletes and coaches, both top women's programs and losing programs still face inequity in the way their university allots funds. This produces a problem for women's athletes, as even when they are successful and win games to gain the favor of the public, they may still not win over donors or university officials and may still not receive equal funding and resources. In this way, sports are systematically structured to favor male athletes – with top resources and funding, one would be hard-

pressed not to succeed, and if women can't win their way toward equal treatment and funding, what can they do?

In conducting this research, I often thought back to a recent commercial produced by Correct The Internet, an organization devoted to “help make sportswomen more visible.” The commercial features a young girl asking a stadium full of internet voice assistants the question “Hey Internet, who scored the most goals in international football?” to which the internet replies “Christiano Ronaldo has scored 118 goals in international football.” The girl appears confused and asks “What about Christine Sinclair? How many goals has she scored in international football?” and the internet replies “Christine Sinclair has scored 190 goals in international football.” The girl counters “Well then who scored the most goals in international football?” but the internet’s answer is still the same: “Christiano Ronaldo has scored the most goals in international football.”³¹

Christine Sinclair is not the only female athlete not properly appreciated for her success. Baylor Women’s Basketball has had countless All Americans and WNBA draftees, yet not many are household names, and there are hosts of other female athletes whose achievements have been overlooked due to misinformation or bias. When taken in conjunction with my findings, the message appears to be that as a society, we value men’s sports but often overlook women’s sports so much so that even our search engines have learned our bias and are giving us answers that continue to perpetuate such bias.

³¹ Correct the Internet, “Correct the Internet - Help Make Sportswomen More Visible.” *Correct the Internet* | *Correct the Internet - Help Make Sportswomen More Visible*, 2022, Accessed 4 Feb. 2023. <https://www.correcttheinternet.com/>.

As I wrap up, I will take a final look at how both the differences in media coverage and in resources discussed in the previous chapters interact, and what that ultimately means for female athletics.

CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusion

In this thesis, I analyzed local media coverage of the Baylor Women's Basketball Program, financial reports for Baylor Athletics, and an existing study of spending patterns across the NCAA in order to examine how success impacts gender inequities in college sports. Throughout, I showed that while success did help minimize disparities to an extent, even among the most successful women's college athletic teams, persistent inequities remained in both media coverage and program funding.

In the first chapter, I showed how the *Waco Tribune-Herald's (Trib)* coverage of the Baylor Women's Basketball Program became more positive once the team began to see success in the 1997-1998 season. However, in the years to follow, coverage became more negative and sparse while the team struggled to win. For the three national championship seasons – 2005, 2012, and 2019, the media coverage was positive, and more articles were written about the team due to their success. In terms of topics discussed, appearance, background, and skill were the most commonly mentioned themes in 2004-2005, dominance, determination, personality, and athleticism in 2011-2012, and dominance, skill, and appearance in 2018-2019. However, descriptive language and the amount of dominance discussed fluctuated from season to season. The second part of my analysis of the *Trib* compared the content and quantity of media coverage for the 2018-2019 Baylor Women's Basketball Team and Baylor Men's Basketball Team. By comparing the two, I showed that while the success of the women's team led to increased coverage across the season with dominance and athleticism being discussed, local media

coverage of the women's team was still different and less abundant than local media coverage of the men's team.

In the second chapter I analyzed Baylor's Equity in Athletics Disclosure Act (EADA) Reports for each of the Baylor Women's Basketball Program's national championship seasons. Overall, I found that less was spent on recruiting female athletes, less of the athletic budget was afforded to female athletic teams, and coaching salaries for both head and assistant coaches of Baylor's women's teams were less than that of coaches' salaries for Baylor's men's teams across all of the years analyzed. Additionally, game attendance and season ticket sales fluctuated more drastically with success for the women's basketball team than for the men. Ticket sales and attendance peaked for the Baylor women in the seasons they were winning national championships and in the seasons directly following. However, steep rises and declines occurred between each season, while the men's team's sales and attendance were more consistent regardless of the team's success.

Finally, in the third chapter I compared Baylor's EADA report data with other universities within the NCAA, drawing on research conducted through *USA Today* and the Knight-Newhouse Data Project to do so. Similar spending patterns displayed at Baylor, such as less of the athletic budget allocated to female athletic teams and lower coaching salaries for coaches of women's sports, were prominent throughout the NCAA regardless of the success of the program. However, Baylor was among the most equitable programs, as were other traditionally successful programs, highlighting how success has helped minimize inequities in spending and treatment for female athletes.

Throughout this thesis, I have proven success to be the key factor affecting media coverage and financial investment for women's athletics. The more successful a women's team and its players are, the more equitable media coverage and treatment it receives. However, success can only do so much. While women's intercollegiate sports programs have come a long way towards equity since the passage of Title IX in 1972, there are still glaring gaps between women's and men's college athletic programs. Furthermore, while the ability of successful female athletes to garner support is promising, and it is good female athletes are being recognized for their success, should female athletes have to continue winning athletic competitions to prove themselves worthy of more equitable treatment? I don't believe so, especially given that male athletic teams are valued regardless of their level of success. Additionally, obtaining the success necessary to gain equitable attention and resources is often difficult because it is due to the resources and fair treatment that teams are more likely to be successful in the first place.

It is important to address the remaining inequities in both media coverage and financial investments in college sports due to the power sports have in influencing how individuals think about the world. Regarding media coverage, by covering particular topics, the media tells individuals what to think about, and by framing the topics in a certain way, the media also tells individuals how to think about them. By only giving female athletes equitable media coverage when they are successful in their sport, sports media outlets perpetuate the idea that fair treatment for women is not given but earned, which signals that female athletes are inferior to male athletes until they prove themselves otherwise. These effects are further reinforced through the continued disparities in financial investment in women's athletics. By underfunding women's sports

and coaching salaries, institutions create a clear division between the value of women's and men's teams. Because of the powerful influence of sports, when people see gender bias allowed in sports, biased attitudes of women being inferior to men are perpetuated in other realms of society as well. However, while the power of sports media and institutions have traditionally reinforced gender discrimination, these institutions can also harness this same power to work to end it. Because colleges and universities have control over their athletic programs and are legally bound by Title IX to treat women's sports equally, they must take responsibility and do better in promoting equity, as fighting sexism in sport could have a great influence on ending sexism in other realms of society. Thus, while Title IX started the movement toward equity in women's college sports, and the success of high-profile teams on a national stage has continued the process, the next step is for female athletes to be given equitable media coverage and resources regardless of their success on the field or court.

As the landscape of college athletics continue to change, a few promising developments may help bridge these gaps and foster support of female athletes independent of their success. One such development is the NCAA's Passage of their Name, Image, and Likeness (NIL) policy in 2021, which allows all NCAA athletes to receive compensation for the use of their name, image, and likeness.¹ Whereas previously the NCAA and universities made money off of student athletes while athletes were forbidden from accepting any form of payment in order to maintain their amateur status, athletes can now receive direct payment through brand deals with companies. Given how

¹ NCSA College Recruiting, "What Is NIL? NCAA Rule Explained," accessed April 3, 2023, <https://www.ncsasports.org/name-image-likeness>.

prominent a role social media plays in several of these deals, female athletes have an advantage as they typically already have a social media presence across a variety of platforms. Furthermore, female athletes generally reach a larger and more diverse audience than male athletes, making them ideal partners for a variety of companies.² Indeed, the data from the past two years shows female athletes, specifically female basketball players, have had some of the largest benefits from NIL. As of March 2022, female basketball players were among the top earners of NIL deals, ranking only second to college football players.³ UCONN's Paige Bueckers, for example, has 31.5 million followers across all social media platforms & makes over \$11,000 per post.⁴ She was the first student athlete ever to sign an NIL deal with Gatorade, and also has partnerships with Bose and Crocs. Baylor's Jaden Owens was one of Baylor's top earners from NIL deals in 2022, with almost 400,000 followers on Instagram and TikTok and brand deals with Overtime Fits, Buff City Soaps, Reebok, Vital Performance, and more.⁵ These lucrative deals with major companies have done more than put money in the athletes' pockets, the endorsements by these brands has exposed these athletes to diverse audiences and has been pivotal in letting female athletes take control of their media narrative for the first time ever. Athletes can now create their own personal brand and put

² Kareem Copeland, "Who's Making Most Money from NIL? Women's Hoops near Top - The Washington Post," accessed April 3, 2023, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/sports/2022/03/30/womens-college-basketball-endorsements-nil/>.

³ Copeland, "Who's Making Most Money from NIL?"

⁴ Pete Nakos, "Who Falls in Top 10 Female Athlete On3 NIL Valuations?," On3, October 4, 2022, <https://www.on3.com/nl/news/who-falls-in-top-10-female-athlete-on3-nil-valuations-sedona-prince-livvy-dunne/>.

⁵ Jeremy Crabtree, "Jaden Owens - Plano West - CG." February 4, 2022. <https://www.on3.com/db/jaden-owens-162722/>.

their names in the media circuit, which while the long-term implications of NIL are still unknown, may continue to spark increased media coverage of female athletes and provide exciting opportunities moving forward for female athletes in their fight for equity. This increase in media coverage may also help attract more fan support and interest in women's sports, which will bring in more revenue and continue to help women's sports succeed.

Ultimately, college sports and the society in which we live in are always changing. Although female athletes still receive less than male athletes, female participation in athletics has grown exponentially since the passage of Title IX, and much has been accomplished toward equity in the 50 years since. Indeed, the abundance of opportunities now available for female athletes to compete at the collegiate level was unheard of 50 years ago. While persistent inequities in media coverage and financial allocations continue today, with the growing attention women's sports are receiving and exciting opportunities provided through NIL, hopefully the next 50 years sees continued growth toward achieving equity in women's sports.

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