

Structuring Interest: A Generational Perspective on High School Girls Basketball

Jennifer Lee Hoffman, University of Washington
Seattle, USA 98115

Title IX is best known for increasing women's participation in high school and college sports throughout the United States. After the passage of Title IX in 1972, women's participation in school sponsored competitive sports has increased substantially. For example, high school girls' sports participation increased from approximately 300,000 in 1971 to 2.8 million by 2001 (Women's Sports Foundation, 2001). However, critics of this law have questioned the purpose of requiring access to the athletic opportunity in education that Title IX has created. Critics claim that women simply do not have the same interest in participating that men do, suggesting surveys to structure opportunity and funding for programs according to interest. (Hawes, 2003). In other educational contexts the complex array of individual attitudes, educational structures, and peer and family attitudes that influence interest are characterized by a "pipeline" that describes participation, persistence, and success in activities typically underrepresented by women (McDonough, 1997; Beadie & Jones, 2004). This paper presents early findings from interviews that examine girl's and women's interest in school-sponsored athletic participation. Interviews with girls and women who played school-sponsored competitive basketball from 1926-2003 are presented. Building on the history of women's athletic participation (Beran, 1993; Cahn, 1994; Festle, 1996, Gutmann, 1991) and how schools structure opportunity (McDonough, 1997), this research demonstrates how women's sports are accepted and valued in high school settings. This paper examines a subset of factors, illustrating how individual attitudes and school structures contribute to real and perceived differences between boys and girls athletic programs today.