

Legacies of Title IX: The Impacts of Sex Segregation on Equality Policy Coalitions in College Sports

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Abstract

What role do policy design and institutional structures play in the maintenance of gender inequalities? Nearly fifty years after the passage of Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, scant research investigates its uneven consequences. In collegiate athletics, where Title IX's implementation is commonly celebrated, an overwhelming amount of spending, opportunities, and scholarships continue to flow disproportionately to men. Despite evidence of widespread support for athletic equality among Americans, there has been no significant movement to demand full enforcement. We investigate why. Can inter-personal contact across groups change policy views? While a vast literature explores the conditions under which inter-personal contact can reduce prejudice, little work studies whether it also can alter opinions about public policy. We theorize that individuals from advantaged groups (e.g., male student-athletes) come to support policies that benefit a marginalized group (e.g., female student athletes) when they learn of the plight of the marginalized group via intergroup contact, and they trust the policy-making institution charged with governance. We test our hypothesis with observational and experimental data from student-athletes, using two original, large-N opinion studies. We find that contact can change policy views in the presence of institutional trust. However, the structuring features of collegiate athletics largely suppress such cross-sex interactions thereby undermining policy coalitions. The results expand prior work on inter-personal contact to look directly at public policy and accentuate how institutions shape the outcome of interactions. They also offer needed critical perspective on the uneven legacies of Title IX, and the roadblocks to full equality in college sports.