

---

# The Relationship Between Sexist Naming Practices and Athletic Opportunities at Colleges and Universities in the Southern United States

**Cynthia Fabrizio Pelak**  
*University of Memphis*

This research examines the phenomenon of sexist naming of women's athletic teams at four-year colleges and universities in the southern United States. Drawing on theoretical and methodological insights from feminist scholarship on gender and sports, gendered language, and intersecting systems of race and gender inequalities, the author analyzes (1) the forms of and the extent to which sexist names are used, (2) the typical characteristics of schools that use sexist names, and (3) the relationship between sexist naming and the uneven distribution of athletic opportunities among female and male students. The findings demonstrate that sexist team names are the norm at southern schools and that the use of sexist names is negatively associated with equitable athletic opportunities for women students. They reveal that sexist naming and the overall gender equity climate of athletics departments are related to the persistence of gender inequities in collegiate athletics.

---

**A**s a \$3 billion-a-year industry that is organized upon sex distinctions, collegiate athletics is an important symbolic site for both perpetuating and challenging gender inequalities in higher education. Despite the 35-year-old law of Title IX of the Educational Amendment Act of 1972<sup>1</sup> and recent Title IX court decisions that favored female athletes, most universities still do not provide equitable athletic opportunities for women students (Messner 2002; Suggs 2004). The persistence of male dominance in collegiate athletics, coupled with the continued relative invisibility and frequent trivialization of women's collegiate sports, raises questions of resistance to change within higher education (Buisse and Embser-Herbert 2004; Huffman, Tuggle, and Rosengard 2004).

Gender stratification in college sports can be explained by numerous structural and ideolog-

ical factors (Anderson, Cheslock, and Ehrenberg 2006; Messner 2002; Staurowsky 1995, 1996). This article focuses on the role that naming practices play in the process of reproducing women's subordination in college athletics and explores how historical race relations mediate this process. Symbolic interactionists have long recognized the power of names and the relationship between names and action. According to Charmaz (2006:396):

Names classify objects and events and convey meanings and distinctions. Names carry weight, whether light or heavy. Names provide ways of knowing—and being. Names construct and reify human bonds and social divisions. We attach value to some names and dismiss others. . . . Names, then, are rooted in actions and give rise to specific practices.

Gender scholars have also theorized how names and language are gendered. Miller and

Swift (1977) contended that sexist language reflects and reconstructs unequal power relations between women and men. Spender (1980) and L. Richardson (1987) argued that gendered naming practices are symbolically important to marking gender differences, defining femininities and masculinities, and assigning value to women and men. The linguistic turn of recent poststructural scholarship has also elucidated the importance of discursive constructions of gender (Bordo 2003; Butler 1993; Foucault 1976/1985). Although the dialectic process between sexist naming practices and structural arrangements in society has been widely recognized by scholars, mapping out empirical links between sexist naming and gender inequality remains an ongoing project.

Scholars of the sociology of sports have theorized that gendered language within sports often reinforce the notion that sports are masculine domains and that "real" athletes are male, not female (Messner, Duncan, and Jensen 1993). There is now a large amount of empirical evidence that suggests that the societal ambivalence toward female athletes is constructed and perpetuated through the discursive trivialization of women's sports teams and women's athleticism (Cahn 1994; Creedon 1994; Hargreaves 2000). Research by Eitzen and Baca Zinn (1989) on the naming practices of collegiate sports teams during the 1980s found that 38.1 percent of the schools across the United States used some form of sexist naming. In a more recent study, Ward (2004) found that, among Division IA schools, athletic opportunities available to women students are relatively greater at schools that use nonsexist names, rather than sexist names, for their women's teams. Both Eitzen and Baca Zinn (1989) and Ward (2004) found that schools in the South were more likely to use sexist names than were schools elsewhere in the United States. Finally, research on gender stratification in collegiate athletics has demonstrated that schools in the southern United States offer relatively fewer athletic opportunities for women students than do schools in nonsouthern states (Anderson et al. 2006).

The aim of the study presented here was to extend previous research on sexist naming by examining practices at all four-year col-

leges and universities in nine southern states and by using multivariate regression analyses to explore the relationship between sexist naming and the level of opportunities for women in college athletics. Besides the empirical contributions to understanding patterns of sexist naming and gender equity in athletics, this article makes a theoretical contribution by considering how intersecting systems of inequalities based on race, gender, class, and sexuality operate to maintain sexist naming practices and male dominance in collegiate athletics.

### **SEXIST NAMING, INTERSECTING INEQUALITIES, AND SPORTS**

Relying on Franks's (1982) book of nicknames and mascots of athletic teams at colleges and universities in the United States, Eitzen and Baca Zinn (1989) identified eight forms of sexist naming practices. They defined sexist names as those that "isolate or stereotype some aspect of an individual's nature or the nature of the group of individuals based on their sex" (Eitzen and Baca Zinn 1989:364). The most common form of sexist name they found was the use of a male-specific term as a false generic, such as *Rams*. In the same way that the term *mankind* marks men as the universal norm and renders women invisible, the use of a false generic, such as *the Rams*, marks male athletes as the norm and subsumes female athletes under the male-specific term.

The second most common form of sexist naming found by Eitzen and Baca Zinn (1989) and the most common form found by Ward (2004) was the use of the feminine qualifier *lady* in the name for women's teams. The term *lady* was used in several ways. It was added to a nongendered team name (e.g., *Lady Tigers*), a false generic male team name (e.g., *Lady Rams*), or a diminutive of the men's team name (e.g., *Lady Jags* for the women's team and *Jaguars* for the men's team). Miller and Swift (1977) argued that the qualifier *lady* evokes a standard of propriety and correct behavior and serves as a mechanism of social control of women's behavior. Before the 19th century, the term

*lady* referred exclusively to a woman of superior rank or economic class (L. Richardson 1987). Now the term has become more broadly used for women whose manners, habits, and sentiments have the refined characteristics of those of higher ranks. Although the term has been democratized, it nonetheless still carries overtones recalling the age of chivalry. Lakoff (1975:25) argued that the term *lady* may seem polite at first, but suggested that "a 'lady' is hapless, and cannot do things for herself." Lerner (1988:97) further argued that the term *lady* "imparts a tone of frivolity and lightness to the strivings and accomplishments of women." In the context of competitive sports, the term may thus serve to minimize some of the threat that is associated with women's successes in the traditionally masculine and public endeavor of athletics.

In discussing the historical representations of southern women, Fox-Genovese (1994:162) noted that the terms of *woman* and *lady* refer to different forms of mature female identities:

"Woman" suggests at once a more inclusive and more private female nature, whereas "lady" evokes the public representation of that nature. To be a lady is to have a public presence, to accept a public responsibility. But the essence of that presence and that responsibility consists in recognizing and maintaining a sexual division of labor that relegates any proper woman to the private sphere.

Beyond the gendered and class-based meanings, the term *lady* has been historically racially coded, particularly in the southern United States. Throughout the 19th century and much of the 20th century, the cult of white womanhood in the South meant that only white women were considered eligible to be ladies (Clinton 1994; Collins 2000). During that period, images of southern white femininity were constructed in opposition to images of black women's femininity, which was considered questionable (B. Richardson 1951). Collins (2000) argued that "controlling images" of black women as jezebels, whores, and "hoochies" have constructed black women in the United States as hypersexual and sexually immoral. The histories of putting white women on a pedestal, sanc-

tioning the rape of black women by white men, and using the pretext of protecting white women's virtue to terrorize black men suggest the deeply engrained relationships between white supremacy and the notions of a lady in the South (Clinton 1994; Ferber 1998).

Higginbotham (1993) and Hammonds (1995) both argued that U.S. black women, particularly those who are economically and socially privileged, have resisted the imagery of the hypersexual black woman with public silence on issues of sexuality and with a politics of respectability that is based on proper Victorian morality. They contended that these racialized, class-based strategies aim to discredit the controlling images of the sexually immoral black woman. For example, historical research by Perkins (1983) found that black women's educational organizations, which were formed during the first half of the 19th century, often used the word *ladies* in their titles, suggesting the adoption of a politics of respectability (Higginbotham 1993; Hammonds 1995).

In the context of competitive sports, the qualifier *lady* takes on an added complexity in terms of sexuality. The historical construction of sports as a male preserve has meant that when women participate in and excel at physical competition, they are often represented and stigmatized as deviating from normative heterosexist gender expectations (Cayleff 1995; Lenskyj 1986). The lesbian stereotype in women's sports is a prime example of this stigmatization process (Griffin 1998). According to L. Richardson (1987), the term *lady* is often used to desexualize women; therefore, the use of the qualifier *lady* for a women's sport team may function to negotiate the lesbian stereotype of the female athlete and make women's participation in competitive athletics more socially acceptable. On the whole, previous theorizing has suggested that the use of the term *lady* is intimately connected to intersecting systems of inequality, namely race, gender, class, and sexuality.

Other less common forms of sexist names identified by Eitzen and Baca Zinn (1989) include the use of physical markers that emphasize women's physical appearance,

such as *belles*; the use of the terms *girl* and *gal*, which mark immaturity; the addition of a feminine suffix, such as *ette*; and the use of a female/male polarity, such as the Sugar Bears versus the Bears. Each of these forms of sexist names not only marks gender differences, but trivializes women's athletic accomplishments (Eitzen and Baca Zinn 1989).

## TITLE IX AND COLLEGIATE ATHLETICS

Building on successful civil rights legislation, Congress passed in 1972 the Title IX of the Educational Amendment Act, which prohibits sex discrimination at schools that receive federal funds. Although Title IX law applies to all types of educational programs, it has become closely associated with athletics. Title IX regulations address three dimensions of gender equity in collegiate athletics: (1) participation; (2) scholarships; and (3) other benefits, such as equipment, facilities, and support services. Compliance with the law is assessed on a programwide basis. Since Title IX was enacted, there have been many rounds of heated debates and controversies about how the law should be enforced (Staurowsky 1996; Suggs 2005). The most contentious dimension of Title IX enforcement is the requirement for equitable participation. Over time, the Office of Civil Rights (OCR) developed and refined a three-pronged test for compliance with the equitable-participation regulation. Institutions have the flexibility of complying with the regulation through any one of three ways (Suggs 2005).

The first way for a school to comply is to demonstrate that female and male students participate in their intercollegiate athletic program in numbers that are substantially proportionate to their undergraduate enrollment. This prong is known as *substantial proportionality* and requires a comparison of the ratio of female and male athletic opportunities to female and male full-time undergraduates. The second way is to show a history and continuing practice of program expansion for the underrepresented sex. The third way is for

a school to demonstrate that the athletics department is fully and effectively accommodating the interests and abilities of the underrepresented sex. Although the OCR has no preferred way for an institution to comply with the Title IX equitable-participation regulation, the first prong of proportionality has been deemed a "safe harbor" for Title IX compliance (U.S. Department of Education 2003). The courts have repeatedly ruled that if an institution complies with the proportionality prong, then that institution is "essentially immune from lawsuits and complaints filed with the civil-rights office" (Suggs 2003). Courts have cited figures of plus or minus 3 to 5 percentage points as the criterion to determine if a school is offering equitable opportunities in athletics to women and men students.

In a recent study, Anderson et al. (2006) found that compliance with Title IX proportionality is a function of the preferences of an institution and its students, the institution's financial resources available to fund athletics, and the structure or organization of the athletics department. They measured institutional and students' preferences with institutional characteristics, such as school size, religious affiliation, private status, geographic location, selectivity, and status as a historically black college or university. They measured a school's financial resources with variables for tuition and fees, state appropriations, endowment assets, and donations. The structure of the athletics department was measured by membership in an athletic league and division and the presence or absence of a men's football program.

In sum, Anderson et al. (2006) found that smaller schools, less selective schools, and schools in the Midwest and South had larger gaps in proportionality than did schools that were larger, more selective, and located in the West. They also found that schools with lower tuition and fees and schools with a men's football program had larger gaps in proportionality than did schools that charged higher tuition and fees and did not have a men's football program. Finally, Division II and Division III schools had larger gaps in proportionality than Division I schools. Building on these findings and other previous research, this article aims to extend

our knowledge base by addressing the following three questions:

1. What are the forms of and the extent to which sexist naming practices for athletic teams are used at four-year colleges and universities in the southern United States?

2. What institutional characteristics are associated with using sexist names for women's collegiate sports teams in the southern United States?

3. What is the relationship between the sexist naming and the level of gender equity within collegiate athletics departments in the southern United States?

## DATA, MEASURES, AND METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

This analysis was based on 249 four-year colleges and universities in 9 southern states: Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia. The 9 states selected were the former 11 confederate states minus 2 states—Florida and Texas. Although parts of northern Florida and eastern Texas are similar socially, politically, and economically to the states that were included, they were dropped from the sample because they differ overall in their racial demographics and sociopolitical contexts (Black and Black 1987). For example, the percentages of blacks or African Americans of the total population in Texas and Florida are the lowest among the former confederate states, which is likely to be consequential for gender relations, given the gendered nature of white supremacy and the historical fear of interracial sexual relations.<sup>2</sup> Only four-year institutions that had basketball programs for both women and men were included in the sample. Since some schools use different names depending on the sport, focusing on basketball offers a consistent point of comparison of naming practices across schools. Basketball was chosen because of its popularity in the South for both women and men.

Institutional web sites were used as the source of data for the names of the women's and men's basketball teams. Multiple pages

on the institutional web sites were searched to determine the names used to identify the teams. The homepages for the women's and men's basketball teams were examined first, followed by news reports and captions of photographs, to determine the most common name for each team. It is important to note that the "official" mascot names were not used to code naming practices. Rather, the actual names used on the official web sites for the women's and men's basketball teams were used. Schools that did not support electronic web sites were telephoned for the information. Two schools were dropped for missing data. Names were coded first as either "nonsexist" or "sexist." Consistent with the definition of sexist names used by Eitzen and Baca Zinn (1989), names were coded as nonsexist if identical, nongender-marked names were used for both the women's and men's teams or if different names were used and those names did not signal or symbolically represent gender differences. Names that signaled gender difference and a devaluation of one team compared to the other team were coded as sexist. To be coded as sexist, the distinct names had to contain an element that trivializes or devalues one of the teams compared to the other team.

Sexist names were further categorized on the basis of the forms identified by Eitzen and Baca Zinn (1989). These forms included using a false male generic, a feminine modifier, a feminine suffix, a diminutive of the men's name, and a demeaning female/male polarity. Names were coded in the "lady" category if the term *lady* was used and no other sexist naming practice was evident. Names that used the term *lady* plus another sexist practice were coded in the second nonlady category. For example, the name Lady Bulls was coded under the "generic male name with a feminine modifier," rather than under the "lady"-only category. In cases in which equivalent gendered names were used, such as Cowgirls and Cowboys, the names were coded as nonsexist because the gendered names were equivalent. In cases in which different names were used and the names implied an active and a passive state consistent with gendered stereotypes, the names were classified as sexist. The gendered mean-

ing of the names that used a female/male polarity were the most difficult to interpret. For this reason, all instances of such names are reported here. Intercoder reliability estimates are not available, but given the fact that such a high percentage of institutions either use the same names for women's and men's teams or use the term *lady* as a sexist prefix, the reliability of the coding of names is likely to have been high. The purpose of categorizing the different types of sexist names is strictly descriptive. The distinction between sexist and nonsexist names is the variable used in the regression analyses.

Table 1 presents the frequency distribution of the numerous forms of sexist and nonsexist names identified in the sample. Overall, 69.5 percent of the institutions use some form of sexist naming and 30.5 percent use nonsexist names. Six forms of sexist names and two forms of nonsexist names were identified. By far, the most common form of sexist name was the use of the feminine qualifier *lady*. As the table shows, 50.2 percent of the schools used *lady* without any other gender marker. An additional 27 schools used the term *lady*, along with another sexist naming practice, which means that a total of 61 percent of the schools used the term *lady* in naming their women's basketball teams.

After the term *lady*, the next most common sexist naming practice was using a male-specific name as a false generic. Eleven schools (4.4 percent) used a male name as a false generic by itself, such as Rams and Knights, and 22 schools (8.8 percent) used a male name as a false generic along with the term *lady*, such as the Lady Statesmen of Delta State University. Five schools (2.0 percent) used a diminutive of the men's team name to name the women's team, and in each of these cases, the diminutive of the men's name was used along with the feminine qualifier *lady*. For example, at Augusta State University, the men's basketball team is the Jaguars, and the women's team is the Lady Jags. Finally, five schools (2.0 percent) used a feminine suffix, and five schools (2.0 percent) used a female/male paired polarity. Examples of feminine suffixes include the Tigerettes of Tuskegee University and the Eaglettes of Tennessee Technological

University. An example of a female/male polarity is the name Cotton Blossoms for women athletes and Boll Weevils (beetles that feed on cotton buds and cotton blossoms) for men athletes at the University of Arkansas at Monticello.

The same name for the women's and men's teams was used at 72 schools, and an additional four schools used different but nonsexist names for their teams. While 30.5 percent of the schools used nonsexist names, the vast majority of four-year colleges and universities in the southern United States use some form of naming that marks and devalues women athletes as the inferior "other" and constructs men athletes as the norm.

### **Dependent Variables**

To explore which school characteristics are associated with sexist naming, I conducted a logistic regression analysis using the dichotomous variable for *sexist naming* as the dependent variable. To examine the relationship between sexist naming and the equitable distribution of athletic opportunities among women and men students, I ran ordinary least-squares (OLS) regression models using *Title IX proportionality* as the dependent variable.

Title IX proportionality was used as the measure for the level of gender equity in athletic opportunities because it is a direct quantifiable measure of gender equity and is a measure that is commonly used by courts to determine Title IX compliance. The Title IX proportionality variable was calculated by subtracting the percentage of full-time female undergraduates who were enrolled from the percentage of female athletes (duplicated counts) at an institution. Negative proportionality figures indicate that women are underrepresented among athletes at the school, and positive proportionality figures indicate that women are overrepresented among athletes at the school. A completely balanced gender proportionality figure has a score of zero. The data source for enrollment figures was the Integrated Postsecondary Educational Data System (IPEDS) data set for 2003–04, and the data source for the per-

**Table 1. Frequencies of the Different Forms of Names for Women's and Men's Basketball Teams (N = 249)**

Team Names	N	%	Examples
<i>Sexist Forms (69.5 percent)</i>			
<i>Lady</i> <sup>a</sup>	125	50.2	<i>Lady Tigers</i> (Grambling State University, Louisiana)
<i>Lady</i> and male name as a false generic	22	8.8	<i>Lady Bulls</i> (Johnson C. Smith University, North Carolina) <i>Lady Statesman</i> (Delta State University, Mississippi)
Male name as a false generic	11	4.4	<i>Rams</i> (University of Mobile, Alabama) <i>Dukes</i> (James Madison University, Virginia)
Feminine suffix	6	2.0	<i>Tigerettes</i> (Tuskegee University, Alabama) <i>Eaglettes</i> (Tennessee Technological University)
<i>Lady</i> and a diminutive of the men's team name	5	2.0	<i>Lady Jags/Jaguars</i> (Augusta State University, Georgia) <i>Lady Buffs/Buffalos</i> (Arkansas Baptist College)
Female/male paired polarity	4	2.0	<i>Sugar Bears/Bears</i> (University of Central Arkansas) <i>Cotton Blossoms/Boll Weevils</i> (University of Arkansas at Monticello) <i>Golden Nuggets/Gold Rush</i> (Xavier University of Louisiana) <i>Evangelists/Preachers</i> (Johnson Bible College, Tennessee)
<i>Nonsexist Forms (30.5 percent)</i>			
Different names but nonsexist	4	1.6	<i>Pipers/Scots</i> (Lyon College, Arkansas) <i>Cowgirls/Cowboys</i> (McNeese State University, Louisiana) <i>Ladies/Gents</i> (Centenary College of Louisiana) <i>Golden Suns/Wonder Boys</i> (Arkansas Tech University)
Same names and nonsexist	72	28.9	<i>Spiders/Spiders</i> (University of Richmond, Virginia)
Total Cases	249	100	

<sup>a</sup> Names that used the feminine modifier *lady*, along with another form of sexist naming, were coded in the second category.

centage of varsity opportunities for women students is the 2003–04 Equity in Athletics Disclosure Act reports (EADA).<sup>3</sup>

Among the 249 schools in the sample, women made up, on average, 57.7 percent of the undergraduate student population but only 40.7 percent of the student-athlete population. The calculated Title IX proportionality scores ranged from -38.90 to 9.81 and are normally distributed around the mean of -16.99. The average proportionality score of -16.99 is at least three times the legally acceptable range of scores (plus or minus 3 to 5 percentage points). Overall, 88 percent of the 249 schools had negative proportionality scores that were beyond the legal range, and less than 10 percent of the schools had proportionality scores that were within the legal range. Women were overrepresented in athletics beyond the legal limit at only one school.

### **Independent Variables**

The independent variables used in the logistic and OLS regression analyses consist of institutional and athletics department characteristics that were previously found to be important determinants of gender equity in collegiate athletics (Anderson et al. 2006; Ward 2004). In the logistic regression analysis of sexist naming practices, the independent variables consist of the following: size of the institution, religious affiliation, private status, the designation as a historically black college or university (HBCU), tuition and fees charged, athletic league and division membership, presence of a men's football program, gender of the head coach of the women's basketball team, and the climate for women in the athletics department (measured as the percentage of female coaches employed by the athletics department). In the OLS regression analysis of Title IX proportionality, the independent variables include all the aforementioned variables with the exception of the gender of the head coach and the additional variable for sexist naming. The sources of data for the independent variables are the IPEDS data for 2003–04, the EADA data for 2003–04, and institutional web sites. Table 2 presents the definitions, measures,

and descriptive statistics of all the variables that were included in the analysis.

*Size of the institution*, defined as the total number of full-time and part-time undergraduate students who were enrolled during the fall 2003 term, was measured as a continuous variable. As Table 2 shows, the sizes of the institutions in the sample ranged from 331 to 38,863 students and averaged 7,147 students. The frequency distribution for the size of the institution is skewed to the left, as suggested by the median score of 3,748 students per institution. Size of the institution was measured in 100s for the regression analyses.

*Religious affiliation* was defined as schools that have a current and formal organizational relationship with a religious organization. Religious affiliation was measured as a dichotomous dummy variable, with the non-religiously affiliated schools coded 0 and the religiously affiliated schools coded 1. A total of 49.4 percent of the schools in the sample are affiliated with a religious organization, and 50.6 percent are nonreligiously affiliated.

*Private status* of an institution refers to whether the school is operated by a private entity, rather than the state. Private status was measured as a dichotomous dummy variable, with private schools coded 1 and nonprivate schools coded 0. A total of 56.6 percent of the schools in the sample are private, and 43.4 percent are nonprivate or public.

The designation of *HBCU* refers to institutions that were created to serve the higher education needs of African Americans who were historically excluded from white-controlled public and private schools. HBCU status was measured as a dichotomous dummy variable, with HBCUs coded 1 and non-HBCUs coded 0. Out of 249 schools, 47 schools, or 18.9 percent of the schools, were designated as HBCUs.

*Tuition and fees* of an institution was defined as the dollar amount charged for a full-time, in-state undergraduate student during 2003–04. The fees and tuition variable was measured as a continuous variable. Tuition and fees ranged from \$2,389 to \$29,810 and averaged \$9,685. The frequency distribution for the variable is skewed to



Table 2. Variables, Definitions, and Descriptive statistics (N = 249)

Variables	Definitions	Descriptive Statistics
<i>Institutional Characteristics</i> Size of the institution	Operationalized as continuous variable of the total number of full-time, part-time, undergraduate, and graduate students enrolled during fall 2003. (In the regression analyses, each unit equals 100 students.)	Mean = 7,147 students Median = 3,748 students SD = 8,307 students Range = 331 to 38,863 students
Religious affiliation	Operationalized as a dummy variable: 0 = nonreligious affiliation (reference group) 1 = religious affiliation	Nonreligious = 50.6% Religious = 49.4%
Private status	Operationalized as a dummy variable: 0 = public schools (reference group) 1 = private schools	Private = 56.6% Public = 43.4%
HBCU	Operationalized as a dummy variable: 0 = non-HBCU (reference group) 1 = HBCU	Non-HBCU = 81.1% HBCU = 18.9%
Tuition & Fees	Operationalized as a continuous variable of the dollar amount of annual tuition and fees for full-time, in-state undergraduate students for 2003–04. (In the regression analyses, each unit equals \$1,000.)	Mean = \$9,686 Median = \$8,608 SD = \$6,471 Range = \$2,389 to \$29,810
<i>Athletic Department Characteristics</i> Athletic League and Division	Operationalized as a dummy variable: 0 = NCAA member (reference group) 1 = non-NCAA member (NAIA, NCCAA, or USCAA) 2 = NCAA Division II schools 3 = NCAA Division II schools	NCAA Division I = 36.5% Non-NCAA = 23.3% NCAA Division II = 26.9% NCAA Division III = 13.3%
Football program	Operationalized as a dummy variable: 0 = absence of football program (reference group) 1 = presence of football program	Football = 53.4% No football = 46.6%

continued

Table 2. Continued

Variables	Definitions	Descriptive Statistics
Gender of the head coach of women's basketball	Operationalized as a dummy variable: 0 = man as head coach (reference group) 1 = woman as head coach	Women = 51.4% Men = 48.6%
% Female Coaches Employed	Operationalized as a continuous variable of the percentage of women among all full-time and part-time head coaches and assistant coaches during 2003–04.	Mean = 22.65%, Median = 22.50% SD = 11.22% Range = 0% to 64.29%
<i>Dependent Variables</i> Sexist naming	Operationalized as a binary dummy variable: 0 = nonsexist name (reference group) 1 = sexist name	Sexist name = 69.5% Nonsexist name = 30.5%
Title IX proportionality	Operationalized as a continuous variable of the percentage of female student-athletes minus the percentage of female undergraduate students (fall 2003).	Mean = -16.99, Median = -17.53 SD = 9.03 Range: -38.90 to 9.81

the left, as suggested by the median tuition and fees of \$8,608. The tuition and fees variable was measured in 100s for the regression analyses.

*NCAA membership* was defined as schools that are members of the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), one of the external athletics organizations that govern intercollegiate athletic competition. The four governing bodies represented in the sample are the NCAA, which governs 76.6 percent of the athletic programs; the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics, which governs 19.3 percent of the athletic programs; the National Christian College Athletic Association, which governs 2.8 percent of the programs, and the United States Collegiate Athletic Association, which governs 1.2 percent of the programs. Given that the NCAA is the dominant governing body in collegiate athletics today and the vast majority of schools in the sample have memberships with the NCAA, the athletic league variable was measured as a dichotomous dummy variable, with NCAA membership coded 0 and non-NCAA membership coded 1. Overall, 23.3 percent of the athletic programs are governed by an organization other than the NCAA.

*NCAA division* refers to the level at which NCAA member schools compete. There are three main divisions (I, II, and III) within the NCAA, although there are also subdivisions within Division I. Division groupings are determined by several factors, including the number of teams supported by the athletics department and the availability of athletic scholarships. Division I schools tend to be the larger, resource-rich athletic programs. Division II schools tend to be large, but with athletics departments that do not offer as many sports as those schools in Division I. Division III schools are typically smaller and, unlike the schools in the other divisions, do not offer athletic scholarships to students. Among the NCAA member schools in the sample, 47.6 percent are Division I, 35.1 percent are Division II, and 17.3 percent are Division III. For the logistic regression analysis, one variable for athletic league and division was created, and for the OLS regression analysis, three dummy variables were created,

with NCAA Division I schools as the omitted category.

The presence of a men's *football program* was measured as a dummy variable, with schools with men's football coded 1 and those without men's football coded 0. A total of 53.4 percent of the schools in the sample have men's football programs and 46.6 percent do not.

*Gender of the head coach of the women's basketball team* was measured as a dummy variable, with female head coach coded 1 and male head coach coded 0. Overall, 51.4 percent of the head coaches of women's basketball teams in the sample are women and 48.6 percent are men. This variable was included only in the logistic regression analysis that identifies the characteristics of schools that use sexist names for their women's basketball team. The variable was included because one would expect that head coaches would have influence over the names used for their teams.

The *percentage of female coaches employed* by the athletics department was used as a proxy measure for the gender-equity climate of the athletics department. The inclusion of a variable for gender-equity climate in the analysis is important because it addresses the possible spurious relationship between naming practice and Title IX proportionality. The measure of the percentage of female coaches thus serves as a control variable. The gender-equity climate in the athletics departments refers to the general attitude toward women and gender equality within the department. The institutional gender-equity climate can be influenced by the numerical representation of women in the athletics department across all levels of administration, coaching, and participation, as well as the commitment of the university to gender equity as embodied by the decisions made by athletic directors and university presidents. The *percentage of female coaches employed* is one direct and available measure of the gender-equity climate and thus was used here. All full-time and part-time head coaches and assistant coaches were used to calculate the percentage of female coaches. The percentages of female coaches ranged from 0 to 64 percent and were normally distributed around the

mean of 22.7 percent, indicating that women are vastly underrepresented among coaches in southern collegiate athletics. The larger the percentage of women coaches employed, the less hostile the institutional context for women and gender equity.

## FINDINGS

### ***Characteristics of Schools Using Sexist Names***

To address the question of which schools are more likely to use sexist names than non-sexist names, a binary logistic regression analysis was run using the dichotomous sexist naming variable as the dependent variable and institutional and athletic characteristics as the independent variables. The logistic regression analysis contrasts the log odds of using a sexist name with the log odds of using a nonsexist name along the variation on the independent variables. The odds ratios estimate whether the institutional and athletics department characteristics increases or decreases the odds of a school using a sexist name, net of other characteristics.

As is shown in Model 1 of Table 3, HBCU status, tuition and fees, non-NCAA affiliation, and gender of the head coach of women's basketball teams are significantly associated with sexist naming practices, net of the other variables in the equation. To interpret these estimates, odds ratios were used. An odds ratio of 1 indicates that the odds of using a sexist name equal the odds of using a nonsexist name. Odds ratios below 1 indicate that the odds of using a nonsexist name were greater than the odds of using a sexist name. Finally, odds ratios greater than 1 indicate that the odds of using a sexist name are greater than the odds of using a nonsexist name.

The significant and positive unstandardized coefficient for HBCUs indicates that the probability of using a sexist name is greater for HBCUs than for non-HBCUs. The odds ratio of 16.566 for HBCUs means that the odds of an HBCU using a sexist name are 16.566 times that of a non-HBCU using a sexist name. The significant and negative unstan-

dardized coefficient for tuition and fees indicates that the probability of using a sexist name decreases at higher levels of tuition and fees charged. The odds ratio of .980 for tuition and fees means that for every additional \$100 in tuition and fees, the odds of using a sexist name decrease by 2.0 percent. The significant and positive unstandardized coefficient for non-NCAA schools indicates that the probability of using a sexist name is greater for non-NCAA schools than for NCAA schools. The odds ratio of 6.100 for non-NCAA schools means that the odds of a non-NCAA school using a sexist name is 6.1 times the odds of an NCAA school using a sexist name. Finally, the significant and negative unstandardized coefficient for woman head coach indicates that the probability of using a sexist name is smaller for teams with female head coaches than for teams with male head coaches. The odds ratio of .345 for women head coach of a women's basketball team means that the odds of a school with a woman head coach using a sexist name are 65.5 percent lower than that of the odds of a school with a man head coach using a sexist name.

In sum, non-HBCU schools, schools with higher tuition and fees, NCAA-member schools, and schools with female head coaches of the women's basketball teams were significantly less likely to use sexist names for their women's basketball teams than were HBCUs, schools with lower tuition and fees, non-NCAA-member schools, and schools with a male head coach of the women's basketball team. Model 2 in Table 3 presents the estimates for a simpler and better-fitting model that includes only the significant variables from Model 1. The odds ratios estimates are slightly different in the models, but the substantive findings are the same.

### ***Relationship Between Sexist Naming and Athletic Opportunities***

To examine the relationship between sexist naming and Title IX proportionality, three OLS regression models were run. The dependent variable in these models is Title IX proportionality, measured as the difference

Table 3. Logistic Coefficients for Regression Analysis of Sexist Naming ( $N = 249$ )

Independent Variables	Model 1		Model 2	
	<i>b</i> (SE)	Odds ratios (exp <sup>b</sup> )	<i>b</i> (SE)	Odds Ratios (exp <sup>b</sup> )
<i>Institutional Characteristics</i>				
Size of the institution (in 100s)	.002 (.003)	1.002		
Religiously affiliated	-.899 (.873)	.407		
Private status	2.190 (1.387)	8.936		
HBCU	2.807** (1.071)	16.566	3.020** (1.038)	20.496
Tuition and fees (in \$100s)	-.020** (.007)	.980	-.012** (.003)	.988
<i>Athletic Department Characteristics</i>				
Non-NCAA schools	1.808** (.668)	6.100	1.886** (.522)	6.596
NCAA Division II schools	.742 (.524)	2.100	.756 (.434)	2.129
NCAA Division III schools	.610 (.606)	1.840	.512 (.529)	1.668
Football program	.196 (.367)	1.217		
Woman head coach of women's basketball	-1.065** (.363)	.345	-1.187** (.342)	.305
Percentage of female coaches	-.014 (.018)	.986		
Constant	1.911		1.809	
-2 Log Likelihood	222.05		226.25	
Cox & Snell $R^2$	.287		.275	
Nagelkerke $R^2$	.406		.389	
Number of Cases	249		249	

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$  (two-tailed tests).

between the percentage of female undergraduate students and the percentage of female student-athletes at the institution. The independent variable of interest is the dummy variable for sexist naming, coded 1 for a sexist name and 0 for a nonsexist name. The other independent variables (institutional and athletics department characteristics) are included as control variables to examine the relationship between sexist naming and ath-

letic opportunities for women students. The results of the OLS regression analyses are presented in Table 4. Model 1 includes only the institutional characteristics, Model 2 includes only the athletics department characteristics, and Model 3 includes both the institutional and athletics department characteristics.

The institutional characteristics included in Model 1 are the size of the institution, religious affiliation, private status, HBCU status,

Table 4. OLS Regression Analysis of Title IX proportionality ( $N = 249$ )

Independent Variables	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	<i>b</i> (SE)	Beta	<i>b</i> (SE)	Beta	<i>b</i> (SE)	Beta
<i>Institutional Characteristics</i>						
Size of the institution (in 100s)	.039** (.009)	.357			.031** (.009)	.281
Religiously affiliated	.143 (2.381)	.008			-.120 (2.164)	-.007
Private status	2.842 (3.445)	.156			.308 (3.322)	.017
HBCU	-.296 (1.557)	-.013			2.597 (1.482)	.113
Tuition and fees (in \$100s)	.018 (.016)	.131			.027 (.017)	.197
<i>Athletic Department Characteristics</i>						
Non-NCAA schools			-3.371* (1.558)	-.158	-1.178 (1.905)	-.055
NCAA Division II schools			-7.477** (1.332)	-.368	-5.411** (1.563)	-.266
NCAA Division III schools			-4.776** (1.631)	-.180	-3.322 (1.941)	-.125
Football program			-6.662** (1.139)	-.369	-7.033** (1.140)	-.389
Percentage of female coaches			.037 (.046)	.046 (.047)	.006	.007
Sexist naming			-3.128** (1.154)	-.160	-2.682* (1.234)	-.137
Constant	-23.144		-8.663		-14.769	
Adjusted $R^2$	.078		.230		.261	
Number of Cases	249		249		249	

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$  (two-tailed tests).

and tuition and fees. Among the institutional characteristics, only the size of the institution had a significant effect on Title IX proportionality, net of the other independent variables in the equation. The positive unstandardized coefficient of .039 for size of the institution indicates that for every additional 100 students the Title IX proportionality score increases by .039 points. Larger schools thus tend to have less inequitable distribution of athletic opportunities for women and men than do smaller schools. Overall, as shown by

the adjusted  $R^2$  statistic of .078, only 7.8 percent of the variance of Title IX proportionality is explained by the institutional characteristics in Model 1.

Model 2 examines the effects of six athletics department characteristics on Title IX proportionality. Five of the six athletics department characteristics have significant negative effects on Title IX proportionality. Model 2 explains 23 percent of the variance of the dependent variable (adjusted  $R^2 = .230$ ). The following athletics department

characteristics—non-NCAA schools, Division II and III schools, schools with football programs, and schools using sexist names—are each associated with less equitable distributions of athletic opportunities for women and men students. As is demonstrated by the unstandardized coefficient, non-NCAA schools have a Title IX proportionality score that is 3.371 points lower than that of NCAA Division I schools. Division II schools have a Title IX proportionality score that is 7.477 points lower than that of Division I schools. Division III schools have a Title IX proportionality score that is 4.776 points lower than that of Division I schools. Schools with football programs have a Title IX proportionality score that is 6.662 points lower than that of schools without football programs. Finally, schools that use sexist names for their women's basketball teams have a Title IX proportionality score that is 3.128 points lower than that of schools that use nonsexist names. The percentage of female coaches employed in the athletics department is not significantly associated with Title IX proportionality, net of other independent variables in the equation. Division II and football are the strongest predictors of Title IX proportionality, with beta coefficients of  $-.368$  and  $-.369$ , respectively.

Model 3 includes all institutional and athletic department characteristics. As the model shows, four variables—size of the institution, Division II, football program, and sexist naming—have significant effects on Title IX proportionality net of the effects of the other independent variables in the equation. As indicated by the adjusted  $R^2$  statistic of  $.261$ , the independent variables in Model 3 account for 26.1 percent of the variation in the dependent variable. The strongest predictor of Title IX proportionality in the model is the presence of a football program ( $\beta = -.389$ ). The unstandardized coefficient of  $-7.033$  for football means that net of other independent variables, schools with football programs have a Title IX proportionality score that is 7.033 points lower than that of schools without football programs. Given the large rosters that are typical of men's college football teams, this finding is not surprising. Schools that support large football programs tend to have large gaps in the participation of

women and men in their athletics programs. The second strongest predictor of Title IX proportionality is the size of the institution ( $\beta = .281$ ). The unstandardized coefficient of  $.031$  for size of the institution indicates that for every additional 100 students, the proportionality measure increases  $.031$  of a point. The next strongest predictor of Title IX proportionality is the variable for Division II schools ( $\beta = -.266$ ). The Title IX proportionality scores for Division II schools are, on average, 5.411 points lower than those for Division I schools.

Finally, the significant negative unstandardized coefficient of  $-2.682$  for sexist naming indicates that net of the other variables in the equation, schools that use sexist names have, on average, a proportionality score that is 2.682 points lower than that of schools that use nonsexist names. The relative strength of the variable for sexist naming practices ( $\beta = -.137$ ) is not as strong as the other significant variables, but the effect of sexist naming practices is still meaningful. Overall, schools that use some form of sexist naming have a mean Title IX proportionality score of  $-18.06$ , and schools that use nonsexist names have a mean Title IX proportionality score of  $-14.52$ . On the basis of the average number of (duplicated) female student-athletes (109.7) at schools in the sample, the estimated regression coefficient of  $2.682$  for sexist naming translates into about 3 additional women athletes per school, net of other institutional and athletic department characteristics. This finding suggests that the control variables do not explain much of the differences in proportionality scores across schools with sexist names versus schools with nonsexist names.

## DISCUSSION

In their late 1980s study, Eitzen and Baca Zinn (1989:368) found that 44.4 percent of schools in the South used some form of sexist naming. In contrast, my study found that almost 70 percent of colleges and universities in the South use some form of sexist naming for their women's basketball teams. The difference in the findings of the two studies is most likely due to the different sources of

data on team names, rather than an actual increase in the use of sexist names over time. Eitzen and Baca Zinn (1989) used a book compiled by Franks (1982) that listed the mascots and names of teams for colleges and universities across the United States. It is likely that Franks's compilation underestimated the different names used for the women's and men's teams by simply reporting the "official" name used by schools, rather than what names are used in practice. By using institutional web sites, I considered not only the official mascot names, but the specific names used by the universities to represent the women's and men's basketball teams.

By far, the most common form of sexist naming used is the addition of the feminine modifier *lady* to the men's team name (61 percent). First and foremost, using a feminine modifier marks women athletes and women's teams as the "other" and reinforces the norm of men as the measure of all things (Eitzen and Baca Zinn 1989; Duncan 1993). It indicates that men are the unqualified "real athletes" and women are the "lady athletes." The racialized and class-based ideal of "a lady" is, by definition, in opposition to the ideal of a physically strong, daring, and independent athlete. The use of the modifier *lady* thus dismisses women's athleticism and reflects sociocultural limitations that are imposed on women's physicality. Lerner (1988:97) argued that the term *lady* "imparts a tone of frivolity and lightness to the strivings and accomplishments of women." In the context of competitive sports, the term may thus serve to minimize the anxiety that is associated with women who are successful and powerful in the traditionally masculine endeavor of athletics. Moreover, it may be used as a strategy of middle-class black women in the southern United States to resist controlling images of the black woman as hypersexual and immoral.

The other forms of sexist naming practices that were found, including gendered suffixes, male term as a false generic, and female/male paired polarities, also mark gender differences and devalue women's athleticism. For example, the variations in the names of women's teams, such as Tigerbelles, Tigerettes, or Teddy Bears, mark women's teams and

women athletes as different and as diminutive or inferior to their male counterparts. Such naming practices evoke images of cute, soft, and cuddly domesticated pets, rather than strong, powerful, and courageous athletes. Likewise, the context-specific names of Cotton Blossoms and Boll Weevils for the women's and men's teams at the University of Arkansas at Monticello invoke essentialist notions of gender that are reminiscent of the old nursery rhyme that claims that little boys are made of snips and snails and puppy dogs' tails while little girls are made of sugar and spice and everything nice. Such gendered representations construct women as naturally passive and pretty and men as naturally active and aggressive.

In the examination of which institutional and athletic department characteristics are associated with the use of sexist naming, four characteristics were found to be significantly associated with sexist naming: HBCU status, tuition and fees, athletic association membership, and gender of the head coach of the women's basketball team. Net of the effects of other variables in the equation, HBCUs, non-NCAA member schools, and schools that have men as the head coaches of the women's basketball teams were more likely to use sexist names than were non-HBCUs, NCAA member schools, and schools with women as the head coaches of the women's basketball teams. In addition, tuition and fees were found to be negatively associated with the use of sexist names. As tuition and fees increase, the likelihood of using a sexist name decreases. One explanation for this finding may be related to how economic privilege operates. Given that class status contours individuals' gendered identities and groups' gendered practices (Collins 2000), college women who attend more "prestigious" schools may not have to prove their status as respectable women by using the term *lady* and/or may be able to use their economic class privilege to resist sexist naming practices.

The finding that HBCUs are more likely to use sexist names, particularly the feminine qualifier *lady*, supports the theorizing by black feminist scholars that derogatory representations of U.S. black women have led to a



politics of respectability among privileged African Americans (Collins 2000, Hammonds 1995; Higgenbotham 1993). This resistance strategy aims to promote an image of black women as respectable, virtuous, and sexually honorable, which the term *lady* personifies. The use of the qualifier *lady* by athletics departments at HBCUs may thus be a contemporary expression of the politics of respectability. It is important to note, however, that HBCUs are not associated with fewer opportunities for women in athletics. Given the historical support for black women in sports from the black community, as described by Gissendanner (1994),<sup>4</sup> it is likely that the use of the term *lady* at HBCUs takes on different meanings than it does at historically white colleges and universities in the South. The legacy and continuing practice of institutionalized racism means that marking black women athletes as ladies may be understood not as sexist but, rather, as part of a racial uplift project for African American women.

The significant difference between NCAA and non-NCAA member schools in the use of sexist names may be related to the different level of internal and external scrutiny that schools face regarding their gender equity records. Since the NCAA took over the governance of women's collegiate sport from the Association for Intercollegiate Athletics for Women during the mid-1980s, the NCAA has faced constant pressure from gender-equity advocates to change sexist practices and policies (Suggs 2004). Given that non-NCAA schools tend to have lower profiles than do NCAA schools, they may receive less public scrutiny regarding gender inequities and thus may be less sensitive about using sexist names.

The finding that institutions with female head coaches of the women's basketball teams were less likely to use a sexist name than were institutions with male head coaches is consistent with research that has demonstrated the diverse gendered experiences of women and men coaches (Knoppers 1994). Given the structural and ideological barriers facing women coaches in competitive sports, female coaches may be more aware of the problems of sexist naming than male coach-

es. This finding should be interpreted with caution, however, because these data are cross-sectional and does not address the question of when names were adopted and/or changed.

In terms of the primary question of whether the use of sexist naming is associated with a greater maldistribution of athletic opportunities, these data suggest that they are. The use of sexist names is associated with greater inequity in the distribution of collegiate athletic opportunities for women and men at southern schools. Net of the effects of the other institutional and athletics department characteristics that were used in this analysis, schools that use sexist names have significantly lower Title IX proportionality scores than do schools that use nonsexist names. Lower Title IX proportionality scores indicate that women students have, relative to their enrollment, fewer opportunities to participate in athletics than do men students. The association of sexist naming and women's athletic opportunities is consistent with the argument that sexist language practices reflect and reconstruct unequal power relations between women and men (Miller and Swift 1977; L. Richardson 1987; Spender 1980).

Sexist naming, however, may not have a direct effect on gender inequities. Rather, sexist naming may be one of numerous factors that contribute to an institutional gender-equity climate that constructs women students as second-class athletes and treats men students as the rightful recipients of greater opportunities and resources in athletics. Sexist naming may thus be an important part of the relationship between gender equity and sexist attitudes, values, and institutional climate. The relationships among sexist naming, institutional climate, and unequal opportunities are surely reciprocal (Spender 1980). Unequal opportunities encourage an institutional climate in which sexist naming is tolerated at the same time that sexist names reinforce an institutional climate that leads to the unequal distribution of athletic opportunities for women and men. However, if the institutional climate for gender equity is overall positive, then sexist naming practices may not lead to the unequal distribution of athletic

opportunities. This appears to be the dynamic at HBCUs. To control for the institutional gender-equity climate, a variable for the percentage of female coaches employed by the athletic department was included. Although this variable was significantly associated with sexist naming and Title IX proportionality in the bivariate analysis, the variable for the percentage of female coaches employed was not significant in the multivariate analysis. Sexist naming may thus serve as a better proxy measure for the gender-equity climate in the athletics department than the percentage of female coaches.

Gender scholars widely agree that studies of gender inequalities should not simply construct women as victims but, rather, examine the possibilities of women's agency in resisting sexist oppression (Collins 2000, Mohanty 1991). If one recognizes women's agency in the naming process, the historical use of the feminine modifier *lady* or gendered polarities may be seen as a practical political strategy to negotiate an institutional context in which women are largely excluded. Athletes and coaches may endorse such names as Lady Tigers to encourage the acceptance of women in competitive sports and to heighten the visibility of women's teams. In this way, representing women athletes as "ladies" or "cotton blossoms" may have been a strategy to contend with sexist and homophobic stigmas that women in competitive athletics faced as women's collegiate athletics were emerging (Griffin 1998; Lenskyj 1986). However, at the turn of the 21st century, as women are enjoying an unprecedented number of opportunities within collegiate sports, these strategies may be outdated and actually contribute to the maintenance of gender inequalities (Messner et al. 1993). Although these data do not tell us anything about when or why sexist names were adopted or why they are still used, the multivariate regression analyses suggest that the persistence of sexist naming may contribute to an institutional climate that views men as the rightful recipients of the lion's share of athletic opportunities.

Besides the significant association between Title IX proportionality and sexist naming, three other independent variables—the pres-

ence of a football program, Division II membership, and size of the institution—were significantly associated with Title IX proportionality. The presence of a football program and Division II membership both have negative effects on proportionality, whereas the size of the institution has a positive effect. As Suggs (2004) suggested, smaller and Division II schools may face fewer complaints and less public pressure about gender equity in athletics and thus may be less sensitive to the inequitable treatment of women in athletics. In terms of the effect of football, the large all-male squads that are typical of collegiate football programs in the South is directly related to why schools with football teams have significantly lower proportional opportunities for women students than do schools that do not support such teams. In addition, the absence of the masculine flagship sport of football may affect the climate for gender equity within the athletics department such that women athletes are more valued. Among all the independent variables, football is the strongest predictor of Title IX proportionality.

Overall, these data suggest that sexist naming is not a trivial issue when it comes to opportunities for women in athletics. Using a sexist name, such as Lady Rams, reinforces dominant notions that men are the "real" athletes and women are those other, less-than athletes, which, in turn, contributes to an institutional climate in which gender inequities are tolerated. Moreover, names like Lady Rams reflect the chronic social ambivalence toward women's athleticism and may serve as a reminder for women athletes to act like ladies. Acting like ladies in the context of competitive sports, which rewards aggression and physical dominance, may not only limit athletic possibilities of women, but may discourage collective protest against gender inequalities in athletics. Despite the fact that equitable education-based athletic opportunities for women are mandated by Title IX law and that an unprecedented number of women are competing in collegiate athletics, sexist naming practices are still the norm at southern colleges and universities.

## CONCLUSION

This analysis has revisited and extended the research conducted by Eitzen and Baca Zinn (1989; 1993) and Ward (2004). Previous scholars, including Eitzen and Baca Zinn (1989, 1993), have argued that societal ambivalence toward female athletes is constructed and perpetuated through the discursive trivialization and devaluation of women's sports teams and women's athleticism (Cahn 1994; Hargreaves 2000; Lenskyj 1986; Messner et al. 1993). Using data from 249 four-year colleges and universities in nine former confederate states, I found that 7 out of 10 schools use some form of sexist naming for their women's basketball teams and that 61 percent of the schools use the term *lady* to qualify women's teams and female student-athletes. The norm of sexist naming in the South in the 21st century is understood here in relation to intersecting systems of inequalities, particularly those based on race, class, and sexuality. The persistence of sexist naming and the prevalence of the use of the term *lady* in naming southern women's collegiate teams suggest the continuing significance of white male supremacy in the construction of southern womanhood. The historical mandate for southern women to "act like ladies" in public appears to be reproduced through the naming of women's sports teams.

Status as a HBCU, membership with a non-NCAA governing body, and employing a man in the position of head coach for the women's basketball team are each associated with increased odds of a school using a sexist name for their women's basketball team. In addition, the higher a school's tuition and fees, the lower the odds are that the school uses a sexist name. To examine the relationship between sexist naming and equitable athletic opportunities for women students, I used the Title IX proportionality measure, a common measure used by the courts to determine compliance with Title IX equitable-participation regulations. Through a multivariate regression analysis, I found that the use of sexist names is significantly and negatively associated with Title IX proportionality. Given that these data are cross-sectional, the

precise nature of the relationships between sexist naming and equitable athletic opportunities for women students cannot be determined. However, I argue that sexist naming may contribute to the overall gender equity climate of an athletics department, which, in turn, determines the level of opportunities for women students. Future research on the determinants of gender equity in athletics should develop measures for the institutional gender-equity climate and consider using a measure for sexist naming as an important variable in such analyses.

An important tool for social change used by civil rights activists and feminists during the later part of the 20th century was that of "renaming"—renaming themselves and their experiences. Van Den Bergh (1987) argued that the process of renaming is a vehicle for empowerment that may not directly cause drastic social change, but involves public consciousness-raising that is a precursor to changing behavior. The issue of sexist naming of collegiate sports teams may thus offer a point of entry to challenge male dominance in athletics. Renaming women's collegiate teams in the South may not have an immediate direct effect on gender stratification in athletics, but it may provide a vehicle for increasing awareness of sexism in athletics and empowering women to challenge collectively the inequitable distribution of opportunities and resources in higher education. As Charmaz (2006:396) argued, names carry weight, convey meanings, and construct social divisions that give rise to specific practices. These data do not address whether sexist naming practices are actively contested and do not tell us anything about the meanings that athletes and coaches themselves give to naming practices. To understand more fully the social and political significance of sexist naming and to document the relationship between sexist naming and material opportunities further, future research should explore the meanings that athletes and coaches attach to team names and investigate the incidences in which sexist team names have been dropped. Finally, future researchers who are interested in understanding the persistence of sexism in higher education

should explore how historical and contemporary systems of race, class, and sexuality intersect with gender to reinforce gender inequality and male dominance.

## NOTES

1. The Title IX statute reads: "No person in the U.S. shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any educational program or activity receiving Federal financial aid" (20 U.S.C. 1681).

2. According to the 2000 census, the percentages of blacks or African Americans of the total population in the former confederate states are as follows: Alabama (26.3 percent), Arkansas (16.0 percent), Florida (15.5 percent), Georgia (29.2 percent), Louisiana (32.9 percent), Mississippi (36.6 percent), North Carolina (22.1 percent), South Carolina (29.9 percent), Tennessee (16.8 percent), Texas (12.0 percent), and Virginia (20.4 percent).

3. The EADA database was developed from the 1994 Equity in Athletics Disclosure Act that requires institutions of higher education to provide annual reports to the public and the U.S. Department of Education on gender equity in their athletic departments. The quality of the EADA database has recently been questioned, particularly in regard to financial information reported by schools. Since my analysis did not use any financial data from this database, this is not a concern.

4. Gissendanner (1994) argued that given African American women's history of physical labor, African Americans generally adhere to a much more active ideal of femininity than do their white counterparts in the context of sport. There has been less ambivalence from families and social institutions within the black community about women's participation in sports. The idea that women are fragile and should not attempt physically demanding activities, such as competitive sports, could not be sustained, given black women's long history of physical labor.

## REFERENCES

- Anderson, Deborah, John J. Cheslock, and Ronald G. Ehrenberg. 2006. "Gender Equity in Intercollegiate Athletics: Determinants of Title IX Compliance." *Journal of Higher Education* 77:225–50.
- Black, Earl, and Merle Black. 1987. *Politics and Society in the South*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Bordo, Susan. 2003. *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Butler, Judith. 1993. *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex."* New York: Routledge.
- Buysse, Jo Ann M., and Melissa Sheridan Embser-Herbert. 2004. "Construction of Gender in Sport: An Analysis of Intercollegiate Media Guide Cover Photographs." *Gender & Society* 18:66–81.
- Cahn, Susan. 1994. *Coming on Strong: Gender and Sexuality in Twentieth-Century Women's Sport*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Cayleff, Susan E. 1995. *Babe: The Life and Legend of Babe Didrikson Zaharias*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
- Charmaz, Kathy. 2006. "The Power of Names." *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 35:396–99.
- Clinton, Catherine. 1994. "Bloody Terrain: Freedwomen, Sexuality, and Violence During Reconstruction." Pp. 136–53 in *Half Sisters of History: Southern Women and the American Past*, edited by Catherine Clinton. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Creedon, Pamela. 1994. "Women, Media and Sport: Creating and Reflecting Gender Values." Pp. 3–27 in *Women, Media and Sport: Challenging Gender Values*, edited by Pamela Creedon. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Collins, Patricia Hill. 2000. *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (2nd Ed.). New York: Routledge.
- Duncan, Margaret C. 1993. "Representation and the Gun that Points Backwards." *Journal of Sport and Social Issues* 17:42–46.
- Eitzen, D. Stanley, and Maxine Baca Zinn. 1989. "The De-athleticization of Women: The Naming and Gender Marking of Collegiate Sport Teams." *Sociology of Sport Journal* 6:362–370.
- . 1993. "The Sexist Naming of Collegiate Athletic Teams and Resistance to Change." *Journal of Sport and Social Issues* 17:34–41.
- Ferber, Abbey. 1998. *White Man Falling: Race, Gender, and White Supremacy*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

- Foucault, Michel. 1985. *The History of Sexuality*, translated by R. Hurley. New York: Vintage Books. (Original work published 1976)
- Fox-Genovese, Elizabeth. 1994. "Scarlett O'Hara: The Southern Lady as New Woman." Pp. 154–79 in *Half Sisters of History: Southern Women and the American Past*, edited by Catherine Clinton. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Franks, Ray. 1982. *What's in a Nickname?: Exploring the Jungle of College Athletic Mascots*. Amarillo, TX: R. Franks Publishing Ranch.
- Gissendanner, Cynthia. 1994. "African-American Women and Competitive Sport, 1920–1960." Pp. 81–92 in *Women, Sport, and Culture*, edited by Susan Birrell and Cheryl L. Cole. Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.
- Griffin, Pat. 1998. *Strong Women, Deep Closets: Lesbians and Homophobia in Sport*. Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.
- Hammonds, Evelyn. 1995. "Black (W)holes and the Geometry of Black Female Sexuality." Pp. 379–93 in *Feminism and "Race,"* edited by Kum-Kum Bhavnani. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Hargreaves, Jennifer. 2000. *Heroines of Sport: The Politics of Difference and Identity*. London: Routledge.
- Higginbotham, Elizabeth. 1993. *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880–1920*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Huffman, Suzanne, C. A. Tuggle, and Dana Scott Rosengard. 2004. "How Campus Media Cover Sports: The Gender-Equity Issue, One Generation Later." *Mass Communication & Society* 7:475–89.
- Knoppers, Annelies. 1994. "Gender and the Coaching Profession." Pp. 119–133 in *Women, Sport, and Culture*, edited by Susan Birrell and Cheryl L. Cole. Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.
- Lakoff, Robin. 1975. *Language and Woman's Place*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Lenskyj, Helen. 1986. *Out of Bounds: Women, sport and sexuality*. Toronto: Women's Press.
- Lerner, Harriet G. 1988. *Women in Therapy*. Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson.
- Messner, Michael. 2002. *Taking the Field: Women, Men and Sports*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Messner, Michael, Margaret Carlisle Duncan, and Kerry Jensen. 1993. "Separating the Men from the Girls: The Gendered Language of Televised Sports." *Gender and Society* 7:121–37.
- Miller, Casey, and Kate Swift. 1977. *Words and Women*. Garden City, NY: Anchor Books.
- Mohanty, Chandra Talpade. 1991. "Cartographies of Struggle: Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism." Pp. 1–47 in *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism*, edited by Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Ann Russo, and Lourdes Torres. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Perkins, Linda M. 1983. "The Impact of the 'Cult of True Womanhood' on the Education of Black Women." *Journal of Social Issues* 39:17–28.
- Richardson, Beulah. 1951. *A Black woman speaks . . . of White Womanhood, of White Supremacy, of Peace*. New York: American Women for Peace.
- Richardson, Laurel. 1987. *The Dynamics of Sex and Gender: A Sociological Perspective* (3rd Ed.). New York: Harper & Row.
- Spender, Dale. 1980. *Man Made Language*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Staurowsky, Ellen. 1995. "Examining the Roots of a Gendered Division of Labor in Intercollegiate Athletics: Insights into the Gender Equity Debate." *Journal of Sport and Social Issues* 19:28–44.
- . 1996. "Blaming the Victim: Resistance in the Battle over Gender Equity in Intercollegiate Athletics." *Journal of Sport and Social Issues* 20:194–210.
- Suggs, Welch. 2003, January 3. "A Federal Commission Wrestles with Gender Equity in Sports." *Chronicle of Higher Education* 49(17):A41.
- . 2004, June 18. "Small Colleges Lag on Sports Opportunities for Women." *Chronicle of Higher Education* 50(41):A1.
- . 2005. *A Place on the Team: The Triumph and Tragedy of Title IX*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- U.S. Department of Education. 2003. "Further Clarification of Intercollegiate Athletics Policy Guidance Regarding Title IX Compliance. (July 11, 2003). Dear Colleague Letter from Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights Gerald Reynolds." Available from <http://www.ed.gov/pabout/offices/list/ocr/title9guidanceFinal.html>
- Van Den Bergh, Nan. 1987. "Renaming: Vehicle for Empowerment." Pp. 130–36 in *Women and Language in Transition*, edited by Joyce Penfield. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Ward, Russell E. 2004. "Are Doors Being Opened for the 'Ladies' of College Sports? A Covariance Analysis." *Sex Roles* 51:697–708.

---

*Cynthia Fabrizio Pelak, Ph.D., is Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology, University of Memphis. Her main fields of interest are social inequality; social movements; racial and ethnic relations; intersections of race, gender, and class; southern Africa studies; and sociology of sport. Her current work focuses on neoliberalism and race in the southern United States.*

*The author thanks Emily Bates, Diane Shinberg, and Barbara Ellen Smith for their assistance in this research. Address correspondence to Cynthia Fabrizio Pelak, Department of Sociology, University of Memphis, 231 Clement Hall, Memphis, TN 38152; email: cpelak@memphis.edu.*

Copyright of *Sociology of Education* is the property of American Sociological Association and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.