

2012

# No Girls in the Clubhouse: A Historical Examination of the Institutional Exclusion of Women From Baseball

Rebecca A. Gualarte  
*Scripps College*

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## Recommended Citation

Gualarte, Rebecca A., "No Girls in the Clubhouse: A Historical Examination of the Institutional Exclusion of Women From Baseball" (2012). *Scripps Senior Theses*. Paper 86.  
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**NO GIRLS IN THE CLUBHOUSE: A HISTORICAL EXAMINATION OF THE  
INSTITUTIONAL EXCLUSION OF WOMEN FROM BASEBALL**

By

**REBECCA A. GULARTE**

**SUBMITTED TO SCRIPPS COLLEGE IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT  
OF THE DEGREE OF BACHELOR OF ARTS**

**PROFESSOR BENSONSMITH**

**PROFESSOR KIM**

**APRIL 20, 2012**

## Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I would like to thank my reader, Professor Benson Smith. She helped me come up with a topic that was truly my own, and guided me through every step of the way. She once told me “during thesis, everybody cries”, and when it was my turn, she sat with me and reassured me that I would in fact be able to do it. I would also like to thank my family, who were always there to encourage me, and give me an extra push whenever I needed it. Finally, I would like to thank my friends, for being my library buddies and suffering along with me in the trenches these past months.

# Table of Contents

<b>Chapter One-Introduction and Theoretical Frameworks.....</b>	<b>2</b>
Theories on Women in Sports and the Exclusion of Women from Male Sports...	4
Organization of the Analysis.....	13
<b>Chapter Two- A Brief History of the Creation of Softball and the Exclusion of Girls from Baseball.....</b>	<b>15</b>
Women Participants in Professional Baseball.....	20
Pictures of Early Women Baseball Players.....	25
Conclusion.....	29
<b>Chapter Three-Baseball as the “National Pastime” .....</b>	<b>30</b>
Albert Spalding and the Creation of the Masculine Myth of Baseball.....	30
The Mills Commission.....	33
The Professionalization of Baseball.....	37
A “Crisis of American Masculinity”.....	40
Creating the “National Pastime”: Baseball and the American Dream.....	44
<b>Chapter Four-Title IX and New Institutionalism.....</b>	<b>47</b>
Youth Baseball Leagues and Institutional Exclusion.....	49
Continued New Institutionalism in Little League.....	53
The “Sport Nexus”.....	55
Title IX.....	56
Baseball and the “Contact Sports Exemption” of Title IX.....	60
Conclusion.....	66
<b>Chapter Five-Discussion and Conclusions.....</b>	<b>68</b>
<b>Works Cited.....</b>	<b>74</b>

## **Chapter One-Introduction and Theoretical Frameworks**

My parents took me to my first San Francisco Giant game when I was only five weeks old. There are pictures of me in my dad's arms, bundled up against the cold of Candlestick Park, in a little Giant's uniform. I grew up around baseball, whether it was at the ball park, or watching the Giants on TV, and I have loved it for as long as I can remember. Baseball is in my blood. When I was little, I couldn't wait until I was old enough to start playing Little League. I can still remember the day that my dad signed me up for the local league that played at the park by my house. I was so excited and I couldn't wait to start practicing. A few days later, my parents told me that I was going to be playing in a girls' softball league instead, because there were hardly any girls in Little League, and they thought it would be a better place for me to play. At five years old, this difference didn't mean anything to me, but I now know that I was affected by the same culturally gendered expectation that says that girls will play softball instead of baseball, that girls who grew up wanting to play the same game as their dads or brothers did were rarely able to. It was not until I was older when I began to wonder why this separation of boys to baseball and girls to softball occurred, that I began to recognize the gender dichotomy that exists in America.

As I grew up, and began identifying more as an athlete with every season that I played, I began to encounter many of the gender-based experiences many female athletes

go through. Among many other experiences, boys would not let me play pick up football with them at lunch during elementary school. They would tell me that I was not as tough as they were because I played softball instead of baseball, and as I grew older I was constantly asked if I was a lesbian since I played softball. These experiences are in no way unique; instead they happen to many girls who choose to enter the masculine dominated world of sports.

So why has softball emerged as the female equivalent to baseball? Have women and girls always been excluded from baseball, and what are the reasons for their exclusion? Among many others, the main questions I will address in this thesis are the following:

1. How does the existence of softball as the female alternative to baseball reflect or confirm beliefs about gender in America?
2. How has the role of baseball as the national past time cemented the masculine hegemony evident in baseball?
3. How has Title IX maintained the gender dichotomy between baseball, and how has the institution of Title IX shaped the behavior of American girls and boys in determining whether they will play baseball or softball? More specifically, how has the “contact sports exemption” affected the participation of girls in baseball through Title IX?
4. How have Little League and other youth baseball leagues continued to exclude girls through informal means and cultural expectations?

In order to answer these questions, I will look at a combination of sources, including; primary sources such as legal cases surrounding Title IX, theoretical writings on gender in sports, perceptions of women in sports, and how institutions shape behavior, as well as historical writings on the creation of softball and the formal and informal exclusion of women from baseball.

My hypothesis is that the separation of women from baseball began as a response to Victorian ideals about gender, but has been maintained by the masculine hegemony of baseball in its role as the national pastime and its correlation with the concept of the American dream, as well as by Title IX having institutionally shaped the behavior and expectations of Americans, and the sporting participation of women since its passage. Additionally, the contact sports exemption of Title IX has allowed for baseball to remain outside the scope of Title IX and therefore girls are not ensured the right to play baseball.

### **Theories on Women in Sports and the Exclusion of Women from Male Sports**

In order to understand the experience of women in sports, it is first necessary to identify the cultural context in which their experiences are occurring. In a society that is mired in a dichotomous concept of masculinity and femininity, and with each gender possessing certain qualities, sport is one of the most male dominated areas of American life. According to Marilyn Cohen;

Although constructions of gender have changed over time, no single social institution, with the exception of the military, has influenced the construction of

hegemonic masculinity-the culturally idealized, persistent and widely accepted form of masculinity- more than sports, where masculine characteristics are learned and reinforced from childhood.<sup>1</sup>

So what are the characteristics commonly associated with masculinity and femininity?

Femininity is most often equated to a tendency to care for others rather than one's self, empathy, and caring. Masculinity is typically characterized by autonomy, self-reliance, and achievement, requiring an asocial, even antisocial, stance to the world.<sup>2</sup> Much of the theoretical writings on women in sport concerns these assumed "sex-roles" and what happens to women when they act outside of them, which is often called "gender-deviant activities".<sup>3</sup> In early writings on women in sports before the resurgence of feminism in the 1960s, there was a pervasive assumption that "so-called cross sex behaviors and preferences (e.g. athleticism among females) were indicators of emotional disturbance and sexual deviation".<sup>4</sup> After the second wave of the feminist movement took hold, there was a distinct movement away from this type of thought, and the main theory to emerge was that of psychological androgyny, which states that "masculinity and femininity are independent, rather than bipolar dimensions so that individuals who exhibit both (for example, female athletes) are mentally healthier and socially more effective".<sup>5</sup> But as M.

Ann Hall points out in her article, *The Discourse of Gender and Sport: From Femininity*

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<sup>1</sup>Cohen, Marilyn. No Girls in the Clubhouse: The Exclusion of Women from Baseball. Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2009. Print. 10.

<sup>2</sup>Hall, M. Ann. "The Discourse of Gender and Sport: From Femininity to Feminism." *Sociology of Sport* 5 (1988): 330-40. *PAIS International*.Web. Oct. 2011. 332.

<sup>3</sup> Hall,333.

<sup>4</sup>Hall, 332. Hall cites Spence, Deaux, &Helmreich, 1985 with this point.

<sup>5</sup>Hall, 332.



to *Feminism*, there is a fundamental problem with such role theories because they simply combine the stereotypical constructs of masculinity and femininity (which she points out are patriarchal constructs to begin with).<sup>6</sup> Hall also points out that scholarship on gender in sports is limited to the study of women, since their actions are viewed as conflicting in contrast to men. In other words, the conflict between gender and culture exists only in the realm of femininity because masculinity is culture.<sup>7</sup> The same can be said for sports, which continues to be a male-dominated sphere.

One theory that addresses the continuing masculine hegemony of the sporting world is presented by Connell (1987). He states that the existing gender order is a dynamic system of power relations, in which multiple masculinities and femininities were constantly being constructed, contested, and altered.<sup>8</sup> However, the sporting world has embraced an ideal of a constructed “hegemonic masculinity”, or the culturally idealized form of masculine character.<sup>9</sup> While there are many varieties and forms of masculinity in society, the sporting world has privileged that of physically strong, heterosexual, successful, and competitive men. Other aspects of this masculinity include the subordination of women, the marginalization of gay men, and the connecting of

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> McKay, Jim, Michael A. Messner, and Donald F. Sabo. *Masculinities, Gender Relations, and Sport*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2000. Print. 2.

<sup>9</sup> Connell, R.W. "An Iron Man: The Body and Some Contradictions of Hegemonic Masculinity." *Sport, Men, and the Gender Order: Critical Feminist Perspectives*. Comp. Michael A. Messner and Donald F. Sabo. Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics, 1990. Print. 83.

masculinity to toughness and competitiveness.<sup>10</sup> This concept of masculinity also focuses on the male body, and how it is necessary to be more physically strong, fit, and gifted than competitors in a sport in order to be successful and gain the sort of hero's recognition that comes with success in the sporting realm. In order to achieve this success, it is also imperative that a man spend much of his time training and improving his body, focusing on little else. By putting so much importance on physical superiority, hegemonic masculinity automatically excludes women, who are assumed to be biologically and physically inferior to men, and therefore unable to reach the same heights of sporting success. Through the de facto exclusion of women from the highest realms of sporting achievement, the concept of masculine hegemony ensures that sports remain the exclusive domain of men, and a certain type of men at that.

This theory is central to the idea that sports were originally constructed as a response to various “crises” of masculinity as a way to naturalize men's subordination of women.<sup>11</sup> As such, sports have continued to be a conservative institution that has maintained unequal power relations between men and women.<sup>12</sup> The causes of the crises of masculinity that brought about this hegemonic masculinity and the rise of competitive sports during the Industrial Revolution will be further discussed and examined in Chapter Four of this thesis.

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<sup>10</sup>Connell, 94.*Sport, Men, and the Gender Order*.

<sup>11</sup>*Masculinities, Gender Relations, and Sport*, 2.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

One of the main focuses of this thesis is the exclusion of women and girls from the men's world of baseball, and consequently it is important to understand some of the theoretical bases for the separation of the sexes in sports. A compelling theory in this area is Don Sabo's "myth of the coed catastrophe". This myth states that "athletic competition between or among both sexes will physically and emotionally harm girls, because as physical inferiors they do better amongst themselves, and harm the boys who face humiliation and lose self-esteem when they lose to girls".<sup>13</sup> Rooted in the traditional conceptions about gender that first led people to believe that women and girls should not partake in athletics or physical activity at all, this myth speaks to the continuing view in America of women as inferior. Even after the passage of Title IX, females continue to face informal barriers to participation in male sports, which will be discussed further in Chapter Three of this thesis.

Many studies on male participation in organized team sports have found that they result in an "orthodox form of masculinity that promotes socionegative (sexist, misogynistic, and antifeminine) attitudes towards women".<sup>14</sup> In his article "*I Used to Think Women Were Weak*": *Orthodox Masculinity, Gender Segregation, and Sport*, Eric Anderson proposes that the segregation of the sexes into "homosocial" environments that limits their contact with members of the opposite sex leads to, in men, an oppositional

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<sup>13</sup>Cohen, 136.

<sup>14</sup>Anderson, Eric. "'I Used to Think Women Were Weak': Orthodox Masculinity, Gender Segregation, and Sport." *Sociological Forum* 23.2 (2008): 257-80. EBSCOhost.Web. 13 Oct. 2011.

masculinity that influences the reproduction of orthodox views regarding women.<sup>15</sup>

Anderson argues that if males want to take part in the institution of sport, they must acquiesce to constructed ideals and norms of masculinity that are presented at the top of the “sporting hierarchy”, which come to replace any more progressive ideas about gender that individual might possess. Some of these orthodox ideas about gender are defined by Anderson as achievable variables “including risk taking, homophobia, self-sacrifice, the marginalizing of others, a willingness to inflict bodily damage, and the acceptance of pain and injury”.<sup>16</sup> Such an orthodox set of beliefs often is accompanied by sexist and misogynistic sentiments in such an environment. Men who transgress the masculine boundaries set by organized sports, for example, those who do not make sports their top priority or those who do not make sacrifices for the sake of victory, are cast out and thought less of.<sup>17</sup> Additionally, male athletes, in particular those who play team sports, have been shown to objectify women, and view them as “sexual objects that need to be conquered”.<sup>18</sup> Accordingly, a study by Crosset et al. in 1995 showed that even though male athletes make up 3.7% of the male populations at Division 1 universities, they are responsible for 19% of reported sexual assaults, with 67% of those reported incidents

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<sup>15</sup> Anderson, 257.

<sup>16</sup> Anderson, 261.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Anderson, 263.

being perpetrated by male athletes who play a team sport (in this case, football, basketball, and hockey).<sup>19</sup>

Anderson also proposes a theoretical model that attempts to explain how the socialization of male athletes into orthodox masculinity is achieved. There are four steps to this model, and they are as follows;

1. *Socialize Them Young.* 75% of parents in America encourage their children to participate in athletics starting at a young age, because they believe that playing sports will teach their children valuable skills such as teamwork and work ethics. Additionally, America is one of the only Western countries that ties public education to athletic programs, leading to large institutional and cultural pressures for children, especially boys, to play sports at school and outside of it.<sup>20</sup>
2. *Separate the Sexes.* Gender segregation in sports is something that is legitimized by myths about physical differences between girls and boys that is “grounded in a mutually agreed-upon notion of boys’ and girls’ ‘separate worlds’”.<sup>21</sup>
3. *Control the Environment.* Hughes and Coakley explain the adherence of male athletes to notion of orthodox masculinity because “the likelihood of being chosen or sponsored for continued participation is increased if athletes over conform to the norms of sport.” Further, the sporting environment is controllable because team sports are a “near-total institution”, which means that they “use myths of

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Anderson, 264.

<sup>21</sup> Anderson, 265.

glory, patriotism, and masculine idolatry, along with corporeal discipline and structures of rank, division, uniform, rules, and punishment, to subordinate individual agency and construct a fortified ethos of orthodox masculinity". A similar environment is the military. Within sports, male athletes who do not follow the rules of masculine behavior are more likely to be verbally insulted and less likely to be given highly sought after playing positions (Anderson, 2002; Bean, 2003; Hughes and Coakley, 1991; Hekma, 1998).<sup>22</sup>

4. *Selectively Recruit Coaches.* Anderson argues that one of the few remaining ways for an athlete to remain involved in the sporting world once their playing career is over is to become a coach, and that men who were marginalized or cast out for failing to adhere to orthodox masculine ideals rarely become coaches. Therefore, coaches who were brought up to abide by these gendered ideals pass them down to a new generation when they become coaches.<sup>23</sup>

Anderson concludes his analysis with a study of men who have participated in feminized sports, and how their perceptions of the athletic ability and physical strength of female athletes has changed. Though the sport at the center of his study is cheerleading, Anderson's conclusion that if men and women participate side by side in a team sport environment, men are likely to come to appreciate the abilities, leadership, athleticism,

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<sup>22</sup> Anderson, 265-266.

<sup>23</sup> Anderson, 268-269.

and many other qualities of female athletes.<sup>24</sup> His argument focuses on men who made the transition from high school football, arguably one of the sports that is most likely to have entrenched hegemonically masculine views of women and sports, to co-ed college cheerleading. This emphasis gives validity to his assertion that the socializing environment of all-male sports teams is one of the main purveyors of the socionegative masculinities found in the sporting world.

In her book *Brainstorm*, Rebecca Jordan-Young directly challenges the conventional wisdom concerning gender and how sex-based characteristics are determined. In her critique of what she calls “brain organization theory”, Jordan-Young refutes the theory that gender and sexuality are conditioned by early fetal exposure to organizing sex hormones, as well as the widely held belief that there are distinct male and female characteristics.<sup>25</sup> She expands this to include sexuality, which she argues is not innate and biologically determined, contrary to the popular scientific narrative.<sup>26</sup> Jordan-Young argues that the prevailing literature on brain organization theory is questionable, as there have not been any experiments done on human subjects, for obvious reasons. Jordan-Young’s main argument centers on the fact that “brain organization studies disregard key elements of both biological and social context, producing oversimplified and reductionist accounts of gender and sexuality”, adding that any study of gender and

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<sup>24</sup>Anderson, 271.

<sup>25</sup>Callaghan, J. "Rebecca Jordan-Young, Brain Storm: The Flaws in the Science of Sex Differences." Rev. of *Brain Storm*. *Feminism & Psychology* 21.4 (2011). *Google Scholar*. Web. 16 Apr. 2012.

<sup>26</sup> Callaghan, *Ibid*.

sexuality cannot be based on the “presumption of stable gendered/sexed ‘essences’”.<sup>27</sup>

This argument has been seen as revolutionary, due to its assertion that instead of operating on a binary determined by brain hormones, gender is much more of a spectrum and that ambiguous sex and sexualities can no longer be considered deviant. In her own words, she states that “there is simply too much overlap between the sexes and too much variation in traits within each sex, for that sort of categorical reference to be useful”.<sup>28</sup>

Jordan-Young’s hypothesis is particularly relevant to this analysis, as for many years women who played sports were considered to be displaying gender deviant behavior, and were seen as less womanly as a direct result. This rethinking of gender and sex traits is something that society at large needs to be made aware of, as it goes a long way towards making differences in those areas more acceptable.

### **Organization of the Analysis**

These are just some of the theoretical bases for the following analysis of the institutional exclusion of women from baseball. Chapter Two of this thesis will cover the historical origins of softball and its transition into the female alternative to baseball, as well as a look at periods in history when women did, in fact, play baseball and when their systematic exclusion began. Chapter Three focuses on baseball’s status as the national pastime in perpetuating the exclusion of women, as well as its ties to the concept of the American Dream and what that means for the role of baseball in America’s national

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<sup>27</sup> Callaghan, *ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> Callaghan, citing Jordan-Young, 52.



conscious. This analysis begins with the role of Albert Spalding and others in creating the myth of baseball as an inherently masculine sport, and how “crises of masculinity” during the Industrial Revolution contributed to the growth of professional sports in America and their status as bastions of masculinity. Chapter Four will be an in-depth look at the provisions of Title IX that ensure the rights of women to equal participation in publically funded athletics. Next, it will utilize the theory of New Institutionalism to explain the influence of culturally held opinions and expectations of behavior in perpetuating the divide between baseball and softball, and its impact on youth baseball leagues. Finally, the chapter examines the role of the “contact sports exemption” of Title IX in limiting the opportunities of females to break into male sports considered to be contact sports, and how this limits the rights of girls to play baseball on male teams. Chapter Five will serve as the conclusion.

## **Chapter Two-A Brief History of the Creation of Softball and The Exclusion of Girls from Baseball**

*Softball is for girls, old people, and those who do not have the skill or inclination to play  
baseball- unknown Little League Manager*

Urban legend has it that the game of softball was created in the 1880s in Chicago as a form of baseball to be played inside during the harsh winter months and as a way to deal with the lack of space for the construction of baseball fields in urban areas.<sup>29</sup> The game was originally played with a ball up to 16 inches in diameter and without the use of gloves. By 1892, there were more than 100 indoor baseball leagues in the city of Chicago.<sup>30</sup> Interestingly, the first games of softball were played by men, though women were permitted to play as well. The modified game was first moved outside in the 1890s by a Minneapolis fire department lieutenant, Lewis Rober, who wanted his firefighters to

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<sup>29</sup>Cohen, 129.

<sup>30</sup>Cohen, 129.

stay in shape while on call at the firehouse.<sup>31</sup> By 1895, outdoor softball had displaced its indoor cousin and was played with a smaller, 12 inch ball with a hard cover, similar to a baseball.<sup>32</sup> Softball saw its first expansion as it was adopted by settlement houses as a way to “improve the living conditions, health and assimilation of poor immigrants and their children.”<sup>33</sup> By 1910, softball and other forms of physical activity were seen as a valuable educational tool, and as a way to instill social and ethical values in young children.<sup>34</sup> In a departure from traditional Victorian ideals, the concept emerged that these teachings were valuable for girls as well as boys, and consequently more and more girls began to play along with their male classmates.<sup>35</sup>

During this era, softball was played in many different forms, under many different names and rules. It was not until 1926 that a defined set of rules for “girl’s baseball” was published by Gladys Palmer and accepted as standard.<sup>36</sup> These rules clearly reflected the continuing Victorian beliefs about gender and the ability of women to participate in physical activity, subscribing to the belief that women were physically inferior to men and that they should not be engaging in vigorous physical activity. In Palmer’s rulebook, *Baseball for Girls and Women*, the author outlines why a completely

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<sup>31</sup>Pagnoni, Mario, and Gerald Robinson. "Appendix A: A Brief History of Softball." *Softball: Fast and Slow Pitch*. Indianapolis, IN: Masters, 1995. Print.

<sup>32</sup>Pagnoni& Robinson, 207.

<sup>33</sup>Cohen, 130.

<sup>34</sup>Cohen, 130.

<sup>35</sup>Cohen, 130.

<sup>36</sup>Cohen, 131.

separate game is necessary for girls or why girls should not play boy's baseball, citing the following list of reasons:

1. The intricate technique of the game is too difficult for the average girl to master.
2. The throwing distances are too great.
3. There is no advantage which cannot be enjoyed through participation in a more simple and well-planned, but less strenuous game, based on the men's game.
4. The danger of injury is unnecessarily great with the use of the small, hard ball.<sup>37</sup>

Such a list clearly speaks to the continuing pervasiveness of the Victorian beliefs that strenuous activity "posed threats to women's physical and reproductive health and served no domestic purpose".<sup>38</sup> While it was becoming more acceptable for women to engage in athletic activity, Palmer's modified rules prove that there was still the perception that women simply could not play the same game as men.

While women's participation in softball was growing, youth baseball leagues were taking steps to formalize the already existing exclusion of girls from baseball. There were never high levels of female participation in baseball, but it certainly occurred until 1929, when the American Legion formally barred girls from participating in their leagues.<sup>39</sup> When Little League Baseball was founded in 1939, female exclusion was written into their bylaws. Exclusion up until that point had been informal but still

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<sup>37</sup>Palmer, Gladys E. *Baseball for Girls and Women*. New York: A.S. Barnes and, 1929. Print.

<sup>38</sup>Cohen, 131.

<sup>39</sup>Cohen, 135.

certainly in place. There was no real need for formalized exclusion until then, as there was still a pervasive cultural belief in America that it was inappropriate for girls to partake in such activities, especially alongside boys. There were few documented cases of girls playing in organized leagues, and those girls who did play were never truly accepted and integrated into the team.<sup>40</sup> With the institutions for development of baseball skills at a young age closed to girls, there were few options other than softball open to those who wanted to play.

In the 1940s, there were 500,000 men's and women's softball teams in America, little consolation for girls who wanted to play baseball like their brothers could.<sup>41</sup> Softball gained popularity swiftly when the first national men's and women's tournament was held in 1933 at the World's Fair in Chicago. Even though both men and women had played softball since its creation, a large part of its growing status as an appropriate women's game was that the small playing field and softer ball played into the persistent view of women as "the weaker sex".<sup>42</sup> Softball did well during the Depression, as it required less space for fields and was less expensive than baseball. It also benefitted from the thousands of athletic fields that were built as part of the New Deal's Works Progress Administration.<sup>43</sup> It is interesting to note that softball has always been played by both men and women, rather than being created explicitly to fill a need for a feminized version

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<sup>40</sup>Cohen, 136.

<sup>41</sup>Cohen, 130.

<sup>42</sup>Berlage, Gai. "Transition of Women's Baseball." *NINE: A Journal of Baseball History and Culture* 9.1 (2001): 72-81. *Women's Studies International*. Web. 27 Sept. 2011.

<sup>43</sup>Berlage, 78.

of baseball for women. Yet, there has never been any thought that playing softball would feminize men, in comparison to the thought that it makes women masculine, which will be discussed later in the chapter.

By 1936, the Amateur Softball Association, the governing body of softball, estimated that there were 92, 545 women's softball teams in the US. With so many participants, it was possible to create the first women's professional league, the International Girl's Major League, in 1942.<sup>44</sup> The league consisted of 32 of the strongest teams in the country, and one can make the assumption that the strongest, most talented players were in the league. This, combined with the intensified competition of the league, created the perception that the women involved were masculine, and even lesbian.<sup>45</sup> It is possible that this conception came about because men also played softball, but there is no clear evidence that supports this theory. A writer for the *Saturday Evening Post* wrote that "the frailest creature on the diamond is frequently the male umpire."<sup>46</sup> People could no longer view softball as the feminine version of baseball once the women who played it took on characteristics associated with men and the masculine sphere. The idea of women as frail, weak beings was shattered once the possibility of women as athletes emerged. In a laughable attempt to counter this perception, the ASA sponsored a beauty pageant in 1942, with the winner taking the title of Miss Softball of America.<sup>47</sup> In the

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<sup>44</sup>Berlage, 78.

<sup>45</sup>Berlage, 78.

<sup>46</sup>Berlage, 78.

<sup>47</sup>Berlage, 78.

1950s, similar efforts resulted in advertisements with feminine players in bathing suits, and other attempts to portray players as womanly and as sexual objects.<sup>48</sup> Such attempts at a professional women's league could not be successful, because of the fundamentally entrenched gender ideals of the time, and the continuing existence of sports as a male dominated world. There was no objection to women playing in amateur settings with no real stakes, but professional sports remained a male prerogative.

### **Women Participants in Professional Baseball**

While it is true that there was not a large population of girls and women who played organized baseball, there were women who played the sport from the 1880s until formal exclusion in the 1930s.<sup>49</sup> Ironically, women's participation was highest during the Victorian era, when the accepted view of women was that they were frail and unable to engage in vigorous physical activity. In the *Transition of Women's Baseball*, Gai Berlage talks about how social class played the biggest part in determining which women played baseball, or at least female versions of it. It was most acceptable for upper class and working class women to play the game. Upper class women had the ability to play in private clubs and in other exclusive settings, and so their participation was not seen, for the most part, by the general population.<sup>50</sup> When their participation was acknowledged, characteristics such as the fact that they played in long dresses created an air of "ladylike amusement", and the sense that their games were more of a social event than a sporting

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<sup>48</sup>Berlage, 78.

<sup>49</sup>Berlage, 78.

<sup>50</sup>Berlage, 73.

event.<sup>51</sup> As such, this kind of participation was not seen as unfeminine and therefore did not pose any sort of a threat to men playing the game. Around this time, baseball was starting to be played at women's colleges in the northeast. Not surprisingly given the environment, "progressive educators at these schools believed a healthy mind required a healthy body, and physical exercise became an important part of the college curriculum."<sup>52</sup> Even though the rules and equipment of the games played at the colleges were the same, the uniforms of long dresses and the "manner of play" created a much more feminine version, similar to that played by rich women in private clubs.

Working class women were accepted participants in the game for an entirely different reason. Berlage points to the fact that women in this situation had already broken Victorian ideas of gender and femininity by working outside the home, so they were free to do other unfeminine things, such as play baseball.<sup>53</sup> Since many of these women worked at jobs that required strength, they were seen as ideal ballplayers. Rural areas had higher levels of female participation, as it was accepted for girls growing up on farms to play baseball with their brothers.<sup>54</sup> Girls from this background often played on barnstorming teams that played against men's team as a kind of novelty entertainment. However, it is important to note that these women rarely played alongside men; they

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<sup>51</sup>Berlage, 73.

<sup>52</sup>Berlage, 74.

<sup>53</sup>Berlage, 73.

<sup>54</sup>Berlage, 74.



could occasionally play against them as a form of entertainment, but most women played against other women in feminized versions of baseball.<sup>55</sup>

Berlage points to several different cases of female players on male teams being used as a novelty to improve attendance and boost ticket sales for semiprofessional and amateur teams. During the Depression years of the 1930s, several women were signed by minor league teams to play in exhibition games against major league teams.<sup>56</sup> In 1931, Virne Beatrice “Jackie” Mitchell pitched for the Chattanooga Lookouts, a Double A minor league team, in an exhibition game against the New York Yankees. The Depression was in full swing and attendance at baseball games had taken a large hit, so management searched for a way to lure people back to the ballpark. Famously, Mitchell struck out both Babe Ruth and Lou Gehrig, but was soon after barred from playing when commissioner Kennesaw Mountain Landis banned women from playing Major or Minor League Baseball.<sup>57</sup> In 1934, Babe Didrikson pitched for the Philadelphia Athletics and the St. Louis Cardinals in exhibition games, and in 1936 Frances “Sonny” Dunlop played for a minor league team.<sup>58</sup> These and several other women were hired for the explicit purpose of drawing crowds and making money for struggling teams. However, by the end of the 1930s, it was no longer a profitable practice and women in professional baseball were a thing of the past.

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<sup>55</sup>Berlage, 75.

<sup>56</sup>Berlage, 76.

<sup>57</sup>Berlage, 77.

<sup>58</sup>Berlage, 77.

The very large exception to this rule was the creation of the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League, during World War II. Created by Chicago Cubs owner Philip Wrigley in 1943 as a way to boost morale during the war, the league was created to fill the absence of Major League play at this time, due to the fact that so many men in the MLB were enlisting in the military.<sup>59</sup> The fact that women were breaking so many gender roles at the time, working in factories and taking over jobs left vacant by men fighting overseas, made it possible for the league to exist at all, but once formed it became a bastion for preserving and reinforcing masculine dominance in baseball.<sup>60</sup> Women were expected to play at the same level as the men they were replacing, yet they were not allowed to be managers or coaches. The teams were not allowed to play any games against male teams, even exhibition games. Players were expected to embody a “socially acceptable athletic femininity”, and were required to play in skirts and attend charm school.<sup>61</sup> Such regulations were a direct attempt to distinguish these women from the women who played on barnstorming teams in earlier decades, and who were seen as masculine and freakish.<sup>62</sup> Cohen quotes the *All-American Girls Professional Baseball League Scrapbook* as saying, “in contrast, the feminine All American ‘girl baseball players’ were not ‘giant huskies...they are feminine American girls of better than average beauty...the AAGBL refuses to hire the masculine rough neck type of player....”<sup>63</sup> The

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<sup>59</sup>Cohen, 44.

<sup>60</sup>Cohen, 45.

<sup>61</sup>Cohen, 48.

<sup>62</sup>Cohen, 47, 48.

<sup>63</sup>Cohen, 48.

players were also subjected to strict rules and regulation on everything from their appearance when they were not playing, to their social lives. The following are examples from the AAGPBL Rules of Conduct:

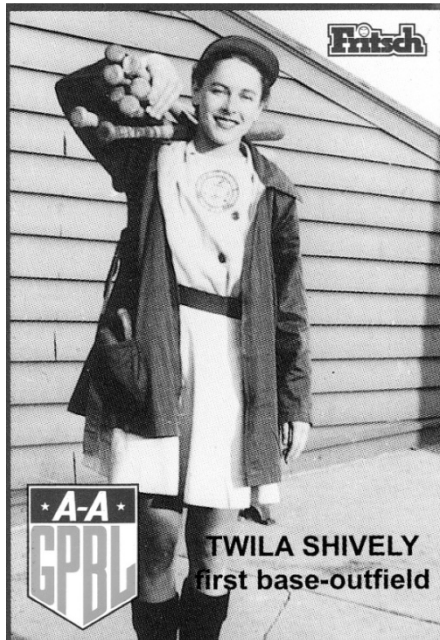
1. ALWAYS appear in feminine attire when not actively engaged in practice or playing ball. This regulation continues through the playoffs for all even though your team is not participating. AT NO TIME MAY A PLAYER APPEAR IN THE STANDS IN HER UNIFORM, OR WEAR SLACKS OR SHORTS IN PUBLIC.
2. Boyish bobs are not permissible and in general your hair should be well groomed at all times with longer hair preferable to short hair cuts. Lipstick should always be on.
3. Smoking or drinking is not permissible in public places. Liquor drinking will not be permissible under any circumstances...obscene language will not be allowed at any time.
4. All social engagements must be approved by a chaperone.<sup>64</sup>

Since most of the players came from backgrounds as tomboys who grew up playing ball in sandlots with their brothers, the league actively tried to assert the femininity of its players with such rules. There were also modifications to the rules of the game that the league operators felt were necessary because of the physical differences between men and women. To “create the optical illusion that women were as fast or threw as hard as men,

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<sup>64</sup>Cohen, 48, 49. The emphasis is from the original rules of the AAGPBL.

the bases were placed 72 feet apart as opposed to 90 feet, the pitcher's mound was 50 feet from home plate, and a slightly different ball was used.”<sup>65</sup> Once the league ended in 1954, all the progress made by the women who played was ignored, as men returned to the US and the MLB began again. After this “golden era” of women’s professional



Twila Shively, AAGPBL, 1947



Early women's baseball team, 1890s

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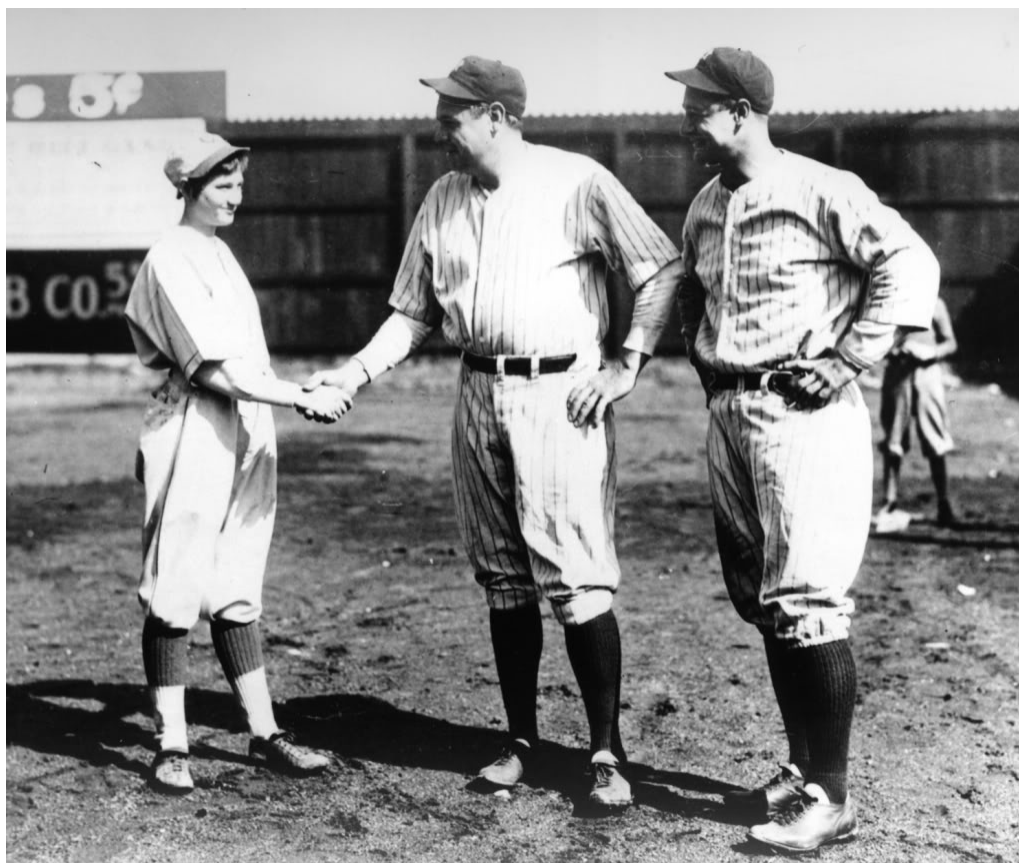
<sup>65</sup>Cohen, 59, 61.



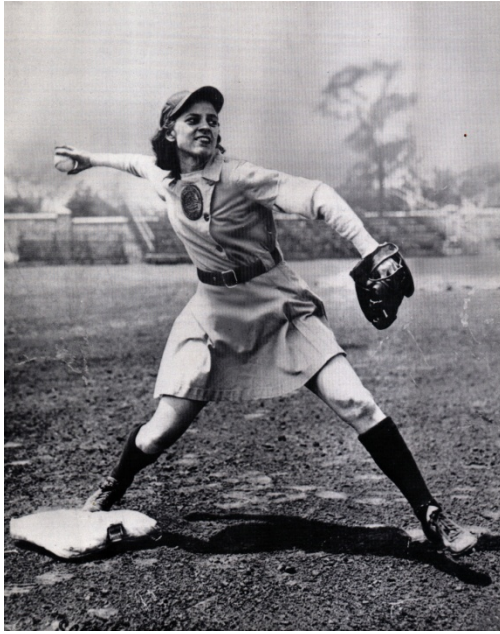
AAGPBL, 1950s



Philadelphia Bobbies barnstorming team, 1920s



Jackie Mitchell pictured after she struck out Babe Ruth and Lou Gehrig, April 1, 1931



Sophie Kurys, AAGPBL, 1950s



Unknown female baseball player, 1890s

baseball, the players were expected to go back to their accepted roles as wives and mothers, and women were once again barred from playing professional baseball.<sup>66</sup>

Omitting the AAGPBL, it was around this time that softball was being cemented as the female alternative to baseball, and as a result fewer women desired to play hardball, as softball became more accepted and expected of them. With the exclusion of girls from youth baseball leagues in the 1930s, young girls only had the opportunity to learn how to play softball, and so the few girls who might have played baseball instead were not permitted to. As such, there are very few accounts of girls playing baseball until Title IX was passed in 1972 and a court decision the following year forced Little League to admit

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<sup>66</sup>Cohen, 63.

girls in 1974.<sup>67</sup> Even so, most girls chose to play softball instead of trying out for boy's teams.

The concept that girls did not have the physical capacity to play baseball remained pervasive in the baseball world for decades after softball as the female equivalent to baseball became socially accepted. Girls had long been barred from youth baseball leagues, despite the continued attempts of individual girls to play in the leagues. As late as 1968, the Director of Public Relations for Little League Baseball, Robert Stirrat, received a letter from a young girl challenging the exclusion of girls from Little League, and sent the following reply:

I am sorry that we must tell you once again that Little League is a boy's game and while I am sure that it comes as a disappointment to you, the rules which govern Little League are made by a committee of about 500 men who meet once every two years and only they can make changes which they believe best for Little League. One of the reasons that girls should not play baseball is that it is a game which requires unusual strength, talents which girls do not have and all doctors advise against permitting girls to participate in this kind of strenuous activity...and I am sure there are many, many, activities in which girls may participate on an equal basis with boys such as swimming, golf, and tennis, but sports such as baseball and football are not among these. I know how disappointed you must be if you are a baseball fan but I know you are old enough to understand why rules are made in the best interest of all young people, boys and girls alike.<sup>68</sup>

Stirrat's response is remarkable for several reasons: it shows the continued pervasiveness of Victorian era gender perceptions that many Americans today undoubtedly thought had long been corrected by that time, as well as the unrealistic opinion of baseball elites that baseball specifically is a game that requires significantly more skill, strength, and talent

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<sup>67</sup>Berlage, 79.

<sup>68</sup>Cohen, 140.

than other sports. As was discussed earlier, baseball, more than other sports, is a game that allows for smaller, less physically strong men to play, since it does not require extraordinary strength. Skill, finesse, and technique are much more important in baseball than size and brute strength. However, these attributes do not inherently exclude women, and are not characteristics that are hegemonically male (like brute strength). This would become one of the main points of contention when girls across America sued for their right to play Little League after the passage of Title IX, which will be explored in the following chapter.

In 1964, President Lyndon Johnson granted the league a Congressional Charter of Federal Incorporation, which charged the league with the following, telling responsibilities to the people of America: (1) “to promote, develop, supervise and voluntarily assist in all lawful ways the interest of boys who will participate in Little League”; (2) “to help and voluntarily assist boys in developing qualities of citizenship, sportsmanship, and manhood”; (3) “using the discipline of the native American game of baseball to teach spirit and competitive will to win, physical fitness through individual sacrifice, the values of team play and wholesome well-being through healthful and social association with other youngsters under proper leadership”.<sup>69</sup> The very wording of such a governmental endorsement less than a decade prior to the passage of Title IX shows that the view of baseball was as an endeavor for boys to undertake and become men, and

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<sup>69</sup>Cohen, 138.



that there was really no place for girls. Girls did not need to develop the same qualities, and continued to be seen as second class citizens of the sporting world.

### **Conclusion**

In the past few decades, there have been only a few cases of women playing for Minor league teams, and those who did play had little success, and it once again raised the question of whether they were signed simply as a publicity stunt. After the release of *A League of Their Own* in 1992, a movie chronicling the All American Girls Professional Baseball League, an all women's professional team called the Colorado Bullets was formed in 1993 to play exhibition games against male teams.<sup>70</sup> However, with so few women having any sort of baseball experience, there was little chance for the team to be competitive, and it was therefore not a large draw for spectators.<sup>71</sup> For the time being, and with the existing institutions and gender constructions, it seems very unlikely that girls will be accepted into the world of baseball any time in the near future.

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<sup>70</sup>Berlage, 79.

<sup>71</sup>Berlage, 79.

### **Chapter Three-Baseball as the “National Pastime”**

*All boys love baseball. If they don't, they're not real boys. –Zane Grey*

The question remains as to why and how baseball has remained one of the last bastions of male hegemony in American sports. As Cohen says, “baseball is a sport where the cultural lag between the passage of civil rights and affirmative action legislation and the subsequent changes in symbolic culture necessary to eliminate prejudice and discrimination remains pronounced”.<sup>72</sup> In an article in the *Providence Sunday Journal* about the Pepe case that integrated Little League, a reporter wrote that “the American sporting world is the zenith of the machismo spirit. And baseball is the zenith of the American sporting world”.<sup>73</sup> So how did baseball come to be tied so closely

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<sup>72</sup>Cohen, 13.

<sup>73</sup>Cohen, 156.

to the sense of masculinity and power of American men? The evidence says that the overall environment in America at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as well as powerful forces within the game itself, converged to ensure that baseball would be a reflection of the power of the American man, as well as a reflection of his assertion of power over the American woman.

### **Albert Spalding and the Creation of the Masculine Myth of Baseball**

Ask an American about the invention of baseball and the most likely story you will hear is about a Civil War General named Abner Doubleday who invented the game in Cooperstown, New York in 1839, when he drew a diamond on a dirt field with a stick.<sup>74</sup> Little do most people know, but this version of history was entirely fabricated by a man named Albert Goodwill Spalding, as a part of his efforts to cement baseball as the national game. The true roots of baseball can be traced back to eighteenth century England, where the first rules for “English base-ball” were written in 1796, long before Abner Doubleday supposedly invented the game.<sup>75</sup> English baseball eventually came to be known as rounders in the 1820s, leading to the perception that American baseball evolved from rounders, not English baseball. A former major league pitcher and future seller of sporting goods, Spalding convened the “Mills Commission” in 1904 to determine the origins of the game, with an agenda to show “once and for all that baseball was indigenous to America and inherently masculine,” a strong reaction against the mere

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<sup>74</sup>Ring, Jennifer. *Stolen Bases: Why American Girls Don't Play Baseball*. Urbana: University of Illinois, 2009. Print.

<sup>75</sup>Ring, 25.

suggestion by historians that baseball was not a purely American game.<sup>76</sup> Rounders had been played for centuries by both male and female children in England, a direct affront to Spalding's additional attempts to sell baseball as a bastion of masculinity in America. Neither of the vital characteristics of baseball as American and masculine could be believed if the American public knew it had really come from a foreign country, and that it was played by girls just as frequently as boys. However, if a Civil War hero who helped to organize the defense of Fort Sumter had invented baseball, it would truly be an American game, as well as one associated with all of the masculine qualities of war and battle.

Keeping baseball as a masculine sphere was important to Spalding for purely personal reasons. He lost his father at the tender age of eight, and when his mother decided to move the family from the countryside to the city when he was twelve, she sent him ahead with plans to join him the following year with his younger siblings.<sup>77</sup> Separated from his family and alone in the city at an impressionable age, Spalding found companionship and a masculine influence to replace the one lost with the passing of his father in the local games of pick up baseball played by other boys in his neighborhood. Spalding credited baseball with making him a man, and found a new type of family in the world of baseball, one that did not include women.<sup>78</sup> For Spalding, baseball was a way to counter the feelings of abandonment he held concerning his mother, and so from that point on, he felt that women had no place in his world of baseball.

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<sup>76</sup> Ring, 20.

<sup>77</sup> Ring, 48-49.

<sup>78</sup> Ring, 50.

## The Mills Commission

The Mills Commission was a seven person committee consisting of three former presidents of the National League, a United States Senator and former Governor of Connecticut, the president of the Amateur Athletic Union, and two of the National League's earliest professional stars. The commission was chartered with the objective of determining the origins of the game.<sup>79</sup> Spalding was the driving force behind the Commission, as he felt a personal need to secure the sport's status as the national game, and a purely masculine one as well. In the words of David Ogden, "Spalding's intention was to portray baseball as the product of U.S. ingenuity and an activity that struck to the core of American values. He constructed myth speech anchoring baseball to those values, which would make the game more palatable to a society in the Victorian era's waning years and promote the game as a vehicle for millions of immigrants to become socialized to a new country".<sup>80</sup> Spalding reasoned that baseball was American "not only because of the democratic and competitive nature of the game itself, but also because of the honest performance of its players and moral courage and sound business practices of its owners".<sup>81</sup> Such a statement clearly speaks to Spalding's efforts to entwine the national character of the nation to that of the game. Additionally, in the beginning pages of his book *America's National Game*, Spalding wrote "to enter upon a deliberate

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<sup>79</sup>Ogden, David C. "Major League Baseball and Myth Making: Roland Barthes's Semiology and the Maintenance of Image." *NINE: A Journal of Baseball History and Culture* 15.2 (2007): 66-78. *Muse*. Web. 5 Apr. 2012.

<sup>80</sup>Ogden, 69.

<sup>81</sup>Ogden, 69.

argument to prove that base ball is our National Game; that it has all the attributes of American origin, American character and unbounded public favor in America, seems a work of supererogation. It is to undertake the elucidation of a patent fact; the sober demonstration of an axiom; it is like a solemn declaration that two plus two equals four".<sup>82</sup> In Spalding's mind there was no question that baseball was the quintessentially American sport; it just remained to prove the rest of America that this was so.

Interestingly, the main way the Commission accumulated its information was by placing ads in newspapers across the country asking Americans who had knowledge of how baseball was created to send them their accounts of the story.<sup>83</sup> In its three year existence, the Mills Commission gathered an abundance of evidence that they claimed supported the Doubleday origin story, but the most influential and later controversial evidence was the testimony of a man named Abner Graves, who claimed he was there when Doubleday created baseball at Cooperstown. Graves and Doubleday went to school together in Cooperstown, and Graves wrote a letter to the Commission that said he witnessed Doubleday create the rules of this new game and write them down on a piece of paper, which had been lost.<sup>84</sup> Immediately from the time that the Commission reported its findings, baseball historians refuted its claims. The Commission never investigated the validity of Graves' account, and if they had, they would have found that

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<sup>82</sup>Spalding, Albert G., and Homer C. Davenport. *America's National Game: Historic Facts concerning the Beginning, Evolution, Development and Popularity of Base Ball : With Personal Reminiscences of Its Vicissitudes, Its Victories and Its Votaries*. New York: American Sports Publ. Comp., 1911. Print.

<sup>83</sup>Mallinson, James. "SABR Baseball Biography Project: A.G. Mills." *Society for American Baseball Research*. Web. 8 Apr. 2012. <<http://sabr.org/bioproj/person/abccef1b>>.

<sup>84</sup>Ogden, 70.

there were several glaring inconsistencies within the story. One particularly damning contradiction in their version of events was the fact that Abner Doubleday was not even in Cooperstown on the day that he supposedly invented the modern game of baseball. He was away at Westpoint, from where he would go on to become the first Union soldier to fire a shot at Fort Sumter, officially beginning the Civil War.<sup>85</sup> Additionally, Graves would have only been five years old when he supposedly witnessed the creation of baseball.<sup>86</sup> Several decades after the Mills Commission, an old baseball, “undersized, misshapen, and obviously homemade, and unlike any of its kind” was found in a farmhouse attic in a town a few miles from Cooperstown. That baseball became known as the Doubleday Baseball, and was used to support the Commissions version of events, though it offered no more proof that this version of events was true. However, the discovery of the ball provided baseball’s elites with another piece of history that they used to cement their myth that baseball was America’s native game. The ball now sits in the Hall of Fame, which is also in Cooperstown.

Tellingly, the head of the Commission himself, A.G. Mills, later made statements that betrayed his uncertainty as to the origins of baseball. On the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the National League in 1926, Mills was asked what conclusive evidence there was that the game of baseball had in fact been created in Cooperstown, to which he replied, “none at all, as far as the actual origin of baseball is concerned. The committee reported that the

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<sup>85</sup>Ogden, 70.

<sup>86</sup>Mallinson, James. "SABR Baseball Biography Project: A.G. Mills." *Society for American Baseball Research*. Web. 8 Apr. 2012. <<http://sabr.org/bioproj/person/abccef1b>>.

first baseball diamond was laid out in Cooperstown. They were honorable men and their decision was unanimous. I submit to you gentlemen, that if our search had been for a typical American village, a village that could best stand as a counterpart of all villages where baseball might have been originated and developed- Cooperstown would best fit the bill”.<sup>87</sup> In the decades since the Mills Commission issued its version of the origins of baseball, it has become widely accepted that baseball as it is known today did in fact come from the English game of rounders, as had been put forth by baseball pioneer Henry Chadwick in 1903.<sup>88</sup> It was this assertion by Chadwick that prompted Spalding to convene the Commission in the first place.

### **The Professionalization of Baseball**

As baseball was becoming more professionalized in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the concept of baseball as business emerged, which by default made it an area for men only as at this time, women had not yet joined the ranks of white collar professionals like those involved with professional baseball. Additionally, it was an area solely for white men, but the exclusion of men of color from baseball is not our primary concern, and will therefore not be addressed. The evidence shows that there was clearly a concerted effort to exclude women from all aspects of professional baseball, spearheaded by Spalding. He and others worked hard to ensure that the place of women in baseball would be in the bleachers, proclaiming “a woman may take part in the grandstand, with applause for the

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<sup>87</sup> Mallinson, James. "SABR Baseball Biography Project: A.G. Mills." *Society for American Baseball Research*. Web. 8 Apr. 2012. <<http://sabr.org/bioproj/person/abccef1b>>.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.



brilliant play, with waving kerchief to the hero...loyal partisan of the home team, with smiles of derision for the umpire when he gives us the worst of it...but neither our wives, our sisters, our daughters, nor our sweethearts, may play Base Ball on the field...Base Ball is too strenuous for womankind.”<sup>89</sup> Spalding’s feelings about women in baseball were reflective of the changing environment in America at the turn of the century, and would be quite influential in excluding women as baseball became a professional endeavor. From the very beginnings of the era of baseball as an organized sport, it was done in a manner that excluded women, as will be shown by an examination of the first baseball club, the Knickerbocker Base Ball Club of New York.

The Knickerbocker Base Ball Club was organized in 1845 by Alexander J. Cartwright, who also established the first formalized set of rules for the modern game, many of which are still in place.<sup>90</sup> It has earned the distinction of being named the world’s first baseball club, setting in motion the era of organization and professionalization of the sport, culminating in the creation of the first professional baseball league, the National Association of Base Ball Players in 1857. This first league consisted of teams from the New York City area, and eventually expanded to include clubs from other areas on the east coast.<sup>91</sup> The NABBP was replaced by the National League of Professional Base Ball Clubs in 1876, known to this day as the National

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<sup>89</sup> Ring, 27.

<sup>90</sup>"Baseball." *Britannica Academic Edition*. Encyclopedia Britannica. Web. 8 Apr. 2012. <[www.britannica.com](http://www.britannica.com)>.

<sup>91</sup>"Baseball." *Britannica Academic Edition*. Encyclopedia Britannica. Web. 8 Apr. 2012. <[www.britannica.com](http://www.britannica.com)>.

League. The rival American League formed in 1901, and, beginning in 1905, the two leagues have met every year (except 1994, when the Players Association went on strike) to play in the World Series.

When the Knickerbocker Club was founded in 1845, it served as more than just as baseball club, but as a social club as well. Its members were meant to be gentlemen and there were strict rules of conduct.<sup>92</sup> Baseball historian Harold Seymour wrote of the clubs that “they were primarily a social club with a distinctly exclusive flavor- somewhat similar to what country clubs represented in the 1920s and 1930s”.<sup>93</sup> By virtue of this fact alone, it is clear that women were not welcome as anything more than spectators in these clubs, as they were seen as places for civilized men to spend pleasure time in sporting pursuits. Within a few years, the upper class exclusivity of such clubs became an obstacle rather than a desired quality, as the game was becoming increasingly popular with the working classes and the game was expanding outside of its white collar origins. But even though working class men were now able to access this part of the game, women were still cast to the sidelines, made to watch instead of play. The professionalization of baseball in America occurred during the period when Victorian gender ideals were still very much entrenched in society, and so it comes as no surprise that they were left out, as women at that time did not undertake strenuous physical activity, or engage in business in any way that would allow them to partake, as baseball

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<sup>92</sup>Rader, Benjamin. "The Quest for Subcommunities and the Rise of Sport." *American Quarterly* 29.4 (1977): 355-69. *JSTOR*.Web. 8 Apr. 2012. 363.

<sup>93</sup>Rader, 363.

was becoming a business. It was in 1858 at a game between the best club players in Brooklyn and New York that the first admission fee was charged at a baseball game, ushering in the era of baseball as a profit making enterprise.<sup>94</sup>

The exclusion of women from the business side of baseball continues today, with startlingly few women holding jobs at the top levels of professional teams. It was not until 1961, when Joan Payson became the co-founder and majority owner of the New York Mets, that a woman first bought a major league sports franchise.<sup>95</sup> Since then, there have only been a handful of female owners of Major League Baseball teams, and most of them took over ownership of their teams after the deaths of their fathers or husbands. Tellingly, there is also only one female public address announcer among the stadiums of the 30 MLB teams, Renel Brooks-Moon who announces at AT&T Park, the home of the San Francisco Giants.<sup>96</sup> Professional baseball seems to remain as much of a boys club as ever at its highest ranks.

### **A “Crisis of American Masculinity”**

At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, American society was undergoing numerous structural changes that were largely seen as threats to the masculine hegemony of the time.

Cornerstones of the masculine identity of the time, such as westward expansion, a population of small farmers and business owners, and a largely white population were

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<sup>94</sup> Spalding, 70-71.

<sup>95</sup> Weiner, Evan. "Women Owners Slowly Gaining Traction." *New York Sun*. 13 June 2008. Web. 8 Apr. 2012.

<sup>96</sup> This is just a fact that I know, though I did double check it with the Giants website.

overtaken by the rise of industrialization, high levels of immigration, and the women's movement of the decade.<sup>97</sup> In Antebellum America, nearly 9 out of every 10 American men were economically autonomous (typically as farmers or small business owners), but by 1910 that figure had dropped to less than 1 in 3 men due to rapid industrialization.<sup>98</sup> The influx of immigrants from Europe and Asia to the United States, along with the recently freed slave population entering the workforce, created an increasingly competitive atmosphere that had white men uncertain about their economic futures.<sup>99</sup> This new lack of control over the means of production and economic security felt by working class American men has been interpreted as the aforementioned "crisis". In the words of M. Hartman,

Men were jolted by changes in the economic and social order which made them perceive that their superior position in the gender order and their supposed "natural" male roles and prerogatives were not somehow rooted in the human condition, that they were instead the result of a complex set of relationships subject to change and decay.<sup>100</sup>

In other words, the monopoly on many societal forces that white, middle class men held was coming to an end. Though the women's movement of the era initially achieved a degree of economic and political progress for women, a "cohesive heterosexual male

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<sup>97</sup>Kimmel, Michael S. "Baseball and the Reconstitution of American Masculinity, 1880-1920." *Sport, Men, and the Gender Order*. Ed. Michael Messner and Donald Sabo. Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics, 1990. 55-65. Print. 57.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> Ring, Jennifer. "America's Baseball Underground." *Journal of Sport and Social Issues* 33 (2009): 373-90. *Google Scholar*. Web. 26 Feb. 2012.381.

<sup>100</sup>Kimmel, 57.

bourgeois ideology that defined men and women in terms of biology and sex” emerged that privileged men for their physical strength and other “natural superiorities”.<sup>101</sup>

One of the responses to this perceived crisis of masculinity was to “revitalize masculinity, to return to the vitality and strength that had been slowly draining from American men”.<sup>102</sup> One of the hallmarks of this response was the rise of sports in America, such as tennis in 1876, basketball in 1891 and foremost baseball.<sup>103</sup> Sports were seen as a way to achieve manliness through physical fitness, but they also instilled important character traits and moral values into the men and boys who played them. As mentioned in previous chapters, the idea emerged that sports made boys into men. It was heralded by Albert Spalding in his book of baseball history, *America’s National Game*, as having players who were “no thugs trained to brutality like the prize fighter...nor half developed little creatures like a jockey”, and who were exemplar of distinctly “native” American values.<sup>104</sup> At the core of this value system was the dichotomy so evident in baseball between “autonomy and aggressive independence...and obedience, self-sacrifice, discipline, and a rigid hierarchy” that is found in team sports.<sup>105</sup>

Coincidentally, Michael Kimmel points out that these are also the character traits needed for work in industrial capitalism, namely a docility and obedience to authority that

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<sup>101</sup> Ring, *America’s Baseball Underground*, 380.

<sup>102</sup> Kimmel, 58.

<sup>103</sup> Kimmel, 59.

<sup>104</sup> Spalding, A. G. *America’s National Game: Historic Facts concerning the Beginning Evolution, Development, and Popularity of Base Ball, with Personal Reminiscences of Its Vicissitudes, Its Victories, and Its Votaries*. 1911. Print. 4.

<sup>105</sup> Kimmel, 61.

“would serve the maintenance of the emerging industrial capitalist order”.<sup>106</sup> Sports served as an arena for expression of masculinity, but also corralled it, and in doing so instilled an obedience to and acceptance of authority and hierarchy. The masculinity seen on the field was a reflection of other values that were traditionally associated with men: courage, initiative, self-control, competitive drive, physical fitness, and others.<sup>107</sup> Baseball allowed men to reclaim some of the manliness they perceived that they had lost, while also grooming its working class participants to be good citizens and workers in the increasingly industrialized America in which they found themselves. But since it was assumed that the characteristics learned through athletic participation were the qualities that made an “exemplary citizen”, women were relegated to a second class citizenship or sorts due to their exclusion from baseball.<sup>108</sup> Kimmel argues that the masculinity constructed by baseball was one that “integrated the various ‘masculinities’ represented by different races and classes into a white, Christian, middle-class norm. It was a sport that enforced and guaranteed race, class, and gender hierarchies”.<sup>109</sup>

Baseball represented different things for men of different classes, and, as such, they had different crises of masculinity, and needed the game for different reasons. Middle class professionals and white-collar workers who no longer contributed physical labor to the economy had an outlet for physical activity and virility, while working class men needed athletics as a distraction from the physical hardship of their industrial work

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid, 62.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid, 64.

<sup>108</sup> Ring, *America's Baseball Underground*, 382.

<sup>109</sup> Ring, *America's Baseball Underground*, 382.

and difficult lives.<sup>110</sup> Theirs was an unruly game, often mixed with drinking and gambling that went directly against the middle class conception that baseball provided a civilizing and controlling influence in its participants.<sup>111</sup> Middle class men created a masculinity “defined by rationality, discipline, and Christian morality” while the working classes “asserted their independence from that enforced order and asserted their masculinity by roughness and passionate physical toughness”.<sup>112</sup> In this light, it is not difficult to see why baseball would appeal to such a large portion of the American population. Different classes found different escapes within the game, but the importance of baseball to the men of a nation in a time of tumult cannot be overlooked. Perhaps the malleable aspect of the game to fit the needs of its participants can help explain why it has become so inseparably entwined with the sense of national character and identity so many Americans feel.

### **Creating the “National Pastime”: Baseball and the American Dream**

Baseball has been hailed as a reflection of the American dream, where a player can rise to fame and fortune through his individual talent and worth, regardless of where he came from or what little he started with. This version of the Horatio Alger myth is in line with the typical concept of the American dream, and it also parallels this dream in that it has largely only been possible for white men. Much has been written on this topic about the exclusion of men of color, but in recent decades this trend has largely changed for the

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> Ring, 382.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

positive. What has not changed, however, is that women remain on the outside of the baseball world looking in, just as they were during the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries when baseball was taking America by storm.

In the early days of professional baseball, there was a push by baseball elites to associate the sport with the American national identity, which also meant that it needed to be seen as powerful and masculine. <sup>113</sup>Baseball was a “symbolic expression of the values and beliefs of the broader [American] society, thus strengthening the structure of the economic, political and cultural hegemony of dominant groups”. <sup>114</sup> The attributes of the game and its participants came to be seen in conjunction with those of the best of Americans; hardworking, independent, hopeful, and many others. John Thorn said, “Baseball had become more than the mere reflection of our rising industrial and political power and its propensity for bluster and hokum; the national game was beginning to supply emblems for democracy, industry, and community that would change America and the world”. <sup>115</sup> The fact that baseball was rapidly gaining popularity during a time when various crises of economics, masculinity, and national identity were gripping America helps to explain why it has become such a deeply engrained part of America’s ethos. It provided an escape from the hardships of life during periods of industrialization, depression, and war, and seemed to be a true reflection of the American

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<sup>113</sup> Ring, *America’s Baseball Underground*, 384.

<sup>114</sup> Elias, Robert. *Baseball and the American Dream: Race, Class, Gender, and the National Pastime*. Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2001. Print. 8.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid.



dream. The nation needed something to believe in, and baseball, more than other sports, provided this because of its perceived American roots and character.

But baseball also mirrored the America of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries for a far less positive reason. In the words of John Thorn:

“The lie of baseball is that it’s a level playing field. That there’s equality. That all the inequalities in American life check their hat at the door. That they don’t go into the stadium. That once you’re there, there’s a sort of bleacher democracy, that the banker can sit in the bleachers and converse with the working man next to him. This is a falsehood. You have race and class issues that mirror the struggle of American life, playing themselves out on the ball fields.”<sup>116</sup>

While Thorn touches on the class and racial exclusions of baseball, the gender exclusions are even more obvious, if for no other reason than most historians and commentators of the game do not even consider them worthy of mention. Baseball is in some sense a reflection of the American dream, because for decades women were not even thought capable of achieving the kind of progress in the American dream. But while women have made great strides towards that dream in other areas of American society, baseball lags far behind and it does not show signs of changing.

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<sup>116</sup>Elias, 17.

## **Chapter Four-Title IX and New Institutionalism**

*The institution of Little League is as American as the hot dog and apple pie.*

*There's no reason why that part of Americana should be withheld from girls- Sylvia  
Pressler*

Central to the discussion of how the passage of Title IX maintains the gender dichotomy between baseball and softball is the question of how governmental institutions shape the behavior of those they affect. In order to answer this question, let us define what constitutes an institution. An institution is something that is in some way a structural feature of society or the polity, which may be formal (a legislature, an agency in the public bureaucracy or a legal framework), or it may be informal (a network of interacting organizations or a shared set of norms).<sup>117</sup> As such, the general conception of institutions is rather broad and undefined for most people. In the case of Title IX, it is an institution in the formal sense, as it is a piece of legislation, as well as a legal framework. There are several necessary components of institutions; first that they transcend individuals to involve groups in some sort of predictable, patterned interaction, second that they exhibit stability over time, and third that they affect individual behavior (more specifically, the institution in some way constrains the behavior of members).<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>117</sup>Peters, B. Guy. *Institutional Theory in Political Science: the New Institutionalism*. London: Pinter, 1999. Print. 18.

<sup>118</sup> Peters, 18-19.

The most comprehensive theory for describing how institutions shape the behavior of their members is called new institutionalism. There are several branches of new institutionalism, though one of the most relevant to our discussion is the branch of normative institutionalism. This theory focuses on the “logic of appropriateness “ in shaping behavior, meaning that human action is driven by rules and conceptions of what is appropriate or exemplary behavior given social perceptions.<sup>119</sup> In this theory, individuals are not seen as individuals, but are instead viewed within the context of their relationships with institutions and other members of these same institutions.<sup>120</sup> As most individuals are members of multiple institutions, there is a constant tension between competing institutional loyalties, and individuals must decide which set of institutional rules by which they are going to abide. As such, individuals cannot make choices autonomously or that maximize their own personal utility since they are bound by such institutional rules and expectations.<sup>121</sup> Another branch, the rational choice branch of institutionalism, says that individual behaviors are a function of responses to rules and incentives, and that institutions like sports teams are systems of rules and inducements to behavior.<sup>122</sup> Finally, mythic institutionalism highlights the importance of organizational myths and stories in defining acceptable behavior of members of the institution.<sup>123</sup> For this study, an example of mythic institutionalism would be the effect of the cultural myth

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<sup>119</sup>Peters, 19.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

<sup>123</sup>Peters, 26.

that baseball is the sphere of men, and that women have no place in it, resulting in the phenomenon of girls choosing not to play in youth baseball leagues after they were desegregated in the 1970s.

### **Youth Baseball Leagues and Institutional Exclusion**

The other institutions that have contributed to the exclusion of women and girls from baseball, as well as to the cultural expectation that softball is for girls and baseball is for boys, are youth baseball leagues such as Little League and American Legion. As mentioned previously, American Legion formally excluded girls from its ranks in 1929, and when Little League was founded in 1939, the exclusion of girls was an informal rule that became formalized in 1951.<sup>124</sup> Prior to this, exclusion was a result of unwritten rules, a result of the cultural construction of baseball as a man's game that women did not even need to be formally excluded from, because they knew it was not their place. It was not until women tried to join men within the ranks of baseball that rules were written prohibiting them from doing so in the 1920s and 30s. But with formal exclusions, there was virtually no venue for girls to play baseball and develop their skills from a young age until the passage of Title IX in 1972. In 1964, Little League became the only sports program to be granted a federal charter, leading to its inclusion under Title IX because it received federal funds.<sup>125</sup> This topic will be discussed in more depth later in the chapter. Prior to the passage of Title IX, it was the standard practice for Little League to revoke

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<sup>124</sup>Cohen, 135, 137.

<sup>125</sup>Cohen, 138.

the charter of any team or league that allowed the participation of girls.<sup>126</sup> In addition to denying girls the right to play, this practice also influenced the behavior of coaches and league officials who might have otherwise allowed girls to play in the league. It is highly unlikely that league officials would sacrifice the right of several hundred boys to play in order to take a stand and allow a few girls that same right. In this way, the institution of Little League was successfully teaching people that there was no place for girls in youth baseball by creating incentives for their exclusion at a local level.

One particularly demonstrative case of this phenomenon occurred in Ypsilanti, Michigan in 1973. The local Little League allowed twelve-year-old Carolyn King to play, and consequently had their charter revoked. League officials initially decided to remove King from the team so that the more than 200 boys in the league could play, but eventually reversed that decision and jointly filed a sex discrimination suit, along with the City of Ypsilanti, against Little League.<sup>127</sup> Though the case was eventually dismissed because it was not a matter of the state, the ruling judge said the following in his decision, “if the present case concerned racial discrimination, defendant Little League might well be deemed to have acted under color of law. But the state action is found more readily when racial discrimination is in issue than when other rights are asserted”.<sup>128</sup> In other words, there was no valid reason or incentive for the state to

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<sup>126</sup>Cohen, 140.

<sup>127</sup>Cohen, 141.

<sup>128</sup>*Ypsilanti Community American Little League, and the City of Ypsilanti v. Little League Baseball, S.B. Stanton*. 505 F.2d 264 (6th Cir. 1974). [Http://federal-circuits.vlex.com](http://federal-circuits.vlex.com). Web. 3 Nov. 2011.

become involved in a matter of sex discrimination; as such problems should be solved at the individual community level.<sup>129</sup> Even the year after the passage of Title IX, issues of gender in America were not seen as important enough to warrant protection through the courts. The case that finally ended the exclusion of girls from Little League was decided a mere two years later, when the Essex County Chapter of the National Organization for Women represented Maria Pepe from Hoboken, New Jersey, after her team had its charter revoked.<sup>130</sup> During the trial, expert testimony from witnesses for Little League stuck to the age-old argument that young girls were physically inferior to boys and would be at too great a risk for injury if they competed together.<sup>131</sup> The testimony focused on children between the ages of eight and twelve, as once they turn thirteen, children move out of Little League and on to other organizations for older players. Experts for the plaintiff countered with physical evidence that said boys and girls between the ages of eight and twelve are equal in physical capability, with girls actually superior to boys in several categories.<sup>132</sup> Once again, opponents of integration advocated that girls play against other girls, but in softball leagues, rather than in baseball leagues, even if they were gender segregated.<sup>133</sup> In her ruling against Little League, Judge Sylvia Pressler wrote the following:

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<sup>129</sup>Cohen, 142.

<sup>130</sup> National Organization for Women, Essex County Chapter, Division on Civil Rights v. Little League Baseball, Inc., 127 N.J. Super. 522; 318 A.2d 33; 1974 N. J. Super.LEXIS 756; 66 A.L.R.3d 1247 (1974).

<sup>131</sup> Cohen, 148-150.

<sup>132</sup>Cohen, 149.

<sup>133</sup>Cohen, 150.

I have no doubt there are reputable psychologists who would agree with the birds of a feather theory. However, the extension of that theory is that whites like to be with whites, blacks like to be with blacks, and Jews like to be with Jews. This whole theory is in contradiction with the laws of this state...we must start somewhere in reversing the trends in this society. Girls should be treated no differently than boys. The sooner that little boys realize that little girls are equals and that there will be many opportunities for a boy to be bested by a girl, the closer they will be to better mental health.<sup>134</sup>

Between the two cases, there were fifty seven lawsuits concerning gender filed against Little League, but none of them were able to bring about the change that the Pepe case did.<sup>135</sup> Despite the fact that Little League eventually lost the ability to legally exclude girls from playing, these rulings did not change the cultural and institutional perspective that baseball still belonged to boys and that girls should instead play softball. The dissenting decision from the Pepe case would emerge as reasoning that would eventually be used for the segregation within Little League, resulting in boys playing baseball and girls playing softball. Judge J. A.D. Meanor wrote about the physical differences between the sexes that emerged after age thirteen, when puberty hit for many children.<sup>136</sup> Meanor wrote the following:

There is virtual concession in this record that from puberty females cannot successfully compete with males in this contact sport. There may be a few isolated females of exceptional athletic ability who can, but for classification purposes, they can safely be ignored. Generally, then, it will be true that females, after reaching adolescence, will be unable to capitalize upon baseball skills

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<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

<sup>135</sup> Cohen, 147.

<sup>136</sup> Cohen, 151.

acquired during childhood unless they do so in all-female competition, which is not now available. Males, on the other hand, may continue in the sport until the approach of middle age and perhaps thereafter. There is nothing unreasonable in the position of Little League in desiring to teach girls a skill that is only temporarily useful...one may consider the impact upon the girl who devoted several years to baseball only to find that upon the onset of puberty she can no longer play...it seems to me reasonable to have a policy, which considering today's available athletic resources, tends to channel female childhood sports into areas that will provide recreational skills susceptible of long-term enjoyment.<sup>137</sup>

This is a good example of how another institution, the judicial system, contributed to cementing the cultural perception that even if they have the option to play baseball, girls should instead still choose to play softball. It also contributed to the social construction of softball being just for girls and baseball being the masculine purview of men. How ironic that the very court case that finally allowed girls to play Little League baseball, if they desired, contained the seeds for their continued marginalization in the "lesser", feminine version of baseball, rather than the same game that their friends and brothers played.

### **Continued New Institutionalism in Little League**

It should come as little surprise given the opposition to integration exhibited by Little League, that the same year the courts ruled in favor of allowing girls to play, Little League created Little League Girls Softball. As of 1974, both the hardball and softball leagues have been technically open to both boys and girls, but there is a very clear lack of crossover of girls into baseball and boys into softball. As of 2009, there have only been

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<sup>137</sup>Cohen, 152.



eight girls to play in the Little League World Series.<sup>138</sup> The first girl to make it to the Series was Victoria Roche, who played for the European team from Brussels in 1984.<sup>139</sup> In the hardball division, players are not asked to disclose their gender when they sign up for the league, so there are no statistics available on the numbers of female players. In 1998, league spokesman Lance Van Auken estimated that “eight boys worldwide” played in the softball division with 400,000 girls.<sup>140</sup> Van Auken also stated how it would be “an exercise in futility” to start a girl’s hardball division, as he deemed that there would not be a single league that would have enough girls to fill a team, due to the lack of a higher level open to female baseball players.<sup>141</sup> Given this argument, it is somewhat ironic that there is now a Boy’s Softball division of Little League, but still no Girl’s Baseball division.

The creation of Little League softball in the wake of the integration of the league shows the power of informal forces in maintaining the separation of girls into softball and boys into baseball. Though girls were now allowed to play in the same leagues as boys, Little League deftly provided them with an alternative that was considered as viable in the eyes of the courts, parents of young girls, and society at large, and one that created cultural barriers to female baseball participation in place of the recently removed institutional barriers. This action perpetuated the cultural expectation that girls and boys

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<sup>138</sup> Ring, Jennifer. "America's Baseball Underground." *Journal of Sport and Social Issues* 33 (2009): 373-90. *Google Scholar*. Web. 26 Feb. 2012. 388.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid.

<sup>140</sup> Zimmerman, Jean, and Gil Reavill. *Raising Our Athletic Daughters: How Sports Can Build Self-esteem and Save Girls' Lives*. New York: Doubleday, 1998. Print. 83.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

had no business playing baseball together, as well as the perception that baseball was for boys and softball was for girls. The fact that Little League's baseball division is open to girls, but that with few exceptions, they sign up for the softball division, shows how influential cultural perceptions are in shaping individual behavior.

### **The "Sport Nexus"**

The idea of new institutionalism and institutional exclusion in sports is expanded in Ann Travers' article *The Sport Nexus and Gender Injustice*. The masculine hegemony of both professional and amateur sports constitute what Travers calls a "sport nexus", or an "andocentric sex-segregated commercially powerful set of institutions that is highly visible and at the same time almost completely taken for granted to the extent that its anti-democratic impetus goes virtually unnoticed".<sup>142</sup> Such institutions contribute to gender inequality by normalizing the idea that a two-sex system is a valid approach to sports, which marginalizes the contributions and participation of women. By accepting the idea that it is acceptable for men and women to have different spheres of sport (like baseball and softball), institutions like Little League create an atmosphere that is free of any abject legal discrimination, but that does not have the necessary conditions for girls to actually participate in the baseball leagues.<sup>143</sup> In the two-sex system, it is perfectly acceptable for softball to exist as the female alternative to baseball. By creating such a system, Little League institutionalizes gender inequality under the guise of giving girls

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<sup>142</sup>Travers, Ann. "The Sport Nexus and Gender Inequity." *Studies in Social Justice* 2.1 (2008): 79-101. *Google Scholar*. Web. 4 Mar. 2012. 79.

<sup>143</sup>Ibid, 80.

the opportunity to participate in baseball, but funneling them to the softball division. The gender binary of the sport nexus perpetuates the core idea of new institutionalism, that perceptions of appropriateness and cultural expectations create an informal exclusion that does the same job as a legal or official exclusion.<sup>144</sup> By highlighting the physical differences between males and females as a gender binary does, it created the cultural expectation that men and women should be separated in arenas of physical competition, of which sport is the arguably the most visible and culturally influential.

### **Title IX**

Arguably the most important legislation to date concerning women and girls in sports is Title IX of the Education Amendments, passed in 1972. Section 1681 of United States Code Section 20 states that “no person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subject to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving federal financial assistance.”<sup>145</sup> Though it addressed gender discrimination in many areas, most Americans know this law because it means that in federally funded institutions such as high schools and universities, men's and women's athletic programs must receive equal levels of funding and resources. When the legislation was passed in 1972, there were fewer than 300,000 high school girls and fewer than 32,000 college women playing sports, and, as of 2010, there were an estimated 3 million girls playing high school sports

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<sup>144</sup>Ibid, 82.

<sup>145</sup>"Title IX, Education Amendments of 1972." *The U.S. Department of Labor Home Page*. Web. 19 Oct. 2011.

and more than 200,000 collegiate women playing sports.<sup>146</sup> To put that in perspective, female athletic participation has increased by 904% in high schools and 456% in colleges.<sup>147</sup> The majority of advances under Title IX have been brought about by legal cases.

In order to be deemed equitable, an athletic department must comply with requirements in three different areas: participation, athletic financial assistance, and treatment.<sup>148</sup> One of the most frequent ways for institutions to demonstrate compliance with the legislation is to prove that the number of athletic opportunities offered to women is proportional to the size of the female portion of the student body.<sup>149</sup> However, like other methods of measuring compliance, the use of proportionality as a measuring stick is not a strict standard due to the fact that there is little enforcement if a school does not meet the requirements. Interestingly, the only monetary requirement of Title IX is that scholarships must be allocated in proportion to the number of female and male students participating.<sup>150</sup> There is no rule that says funding must be equal for men's and women's programs, a common misconception about Title IX. The Department of Education's

*Requirements Under Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972* state:

Colleges and universities have discretion in selecting the methods for determining the athletic interests and abilities of their students, as long as those methods are

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<sup>146</sup>Kennedy, Charles L. "A New Frontier for Women's Sports (Beyond Title IX)." *Gender Issues* 27 (2010): 78-90. *PAIS International*.Web. Sept. 2011.

<sup>147</sup>Kennedy, 79.

<sup>148</sup> [www.womenssportsfoundation.org](http://www.womenssportsfoundation.org)

<sup>149</sup>Tejani, Sharyn. "Title IX: The Deregulation Ploy." *Www.msmagazine.com*. 2003.Web. 28 Oct. 2011.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid.

nondiscriminatory. The only requirements imposed are that institutions used methods that:

- take into account the nationally increasing level of women's interests and abilities;
- do not disadvantage the underrepresented sex (i.e., that sex whose participation rate in athletics is substantially below its enrollment rate);
- take into account team performance records of both male and female teams; and
- respond to the expressed interests of students capable of intercollegiate competition who belong to the underrepresented sex.<sup>151</sup>

Additionally, the guidelines state:

A college or university is not required to offer particular sports or the same sports for each sex. Also, an institution is not required to offer an equal number of sports for each sex. However, an institution must accommodate to the same degree the athletic interests and abilities of each sex in the selection of sports.<sup>152</sup>

The wording of federal directives concerning enforcement of Title IX paints a much different picture of the scope of the legislation than is commonly perceived in America. Though the increase in the sheer number of female athletes speaks to the success of the legislation in some ways, there are ongoing discussions concerning lack of enforcement of the legislation and continuing inequity between men's and women's athletic programs in the areas of financial support, media attention, and alumni loyalty.<sup>153</sup> As of 1998, after 25 years of Title IX, only 36 of the top 300 collegiate athletic programs in the country were in compliance with the legislation.<sup>154</sup>

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<sup>151</sup>"Equal Opportunity In Intercollegiate Athletics: Requirements Under Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972." U.S. Department of Education.Web. 07 Mar. 2012.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid.

<sup>153</sup>"Women and Sports: Do Schools Give Female Athletes Enough Opportunities?" *CQ Researcher* 21.12 (2011): 265-88. *PAIS International*.Web. 18 Oct. 2011.

<sup>154</sup>Weistart, John. "Equal Opportunity? Title IX and Intercollegiate Sports." *The Brookings Review* 16.4 (1998): 39-43. *JSTOR*.Web. 28 Oct. 2011.

Some observers say that the law has forced schools to reduce opportunities for male athletes to make way for women.<sup>155</sup> Arguments using this approach often use the elimination of “minor” men's sports such as wrestling and golf as evidence, but the reason these programs are often eliminated is because of the disproportional funding provided to football and men’s basketball, causing a lack of funding for other sports in the men's program.<sup>156</sup> For example, Division IA football teams are allowed 85 scholarships (which is nearly 40 more players than most professional football teams have), but if this number was cut back to 60 scholarships, schools could save up to \$750,000 a year, more than enough for a wrestling or men's golf program.<sup>157</sup> At small schools, it is not uncommon for the amount spent per football player to exceed the amount spent per women's team.<sup>158</sup> This claim is also soundly refuted by the fact that there was a net gain of 36 men’s collegiate teams between 1982 and 1999, not a decline in the numbers of men's teams, as opponents of Title IX would like the public to believe.<sup>159</sup> Chances are that the debate surrounding Title IX will continue for many years to come.

Concerning baseball and softball, there is the obvious fact that Title IX has created an institutional necessity for the existence of softball to balance out baseball, in attempts to have equal numbers of men's and women's programs in educational settings.

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<sup>155</sup>Women and Sports: Do Schools Give Female Athletes Enough Opportunities?, 267.

<sup>156</sup>Tejani, 72.

<sup>157</sup>Tejani, 73.

<sup>158</sup>Weistart, 41.

<sup>159</sup>Tejani, 71.

Softball was seen as the female counterpart to baseball long before Title IX was passed, but the legislation formalized that perception. The following discussion of institutional theory will shed light on the cultural factors that led to this situation, and why it is no longer necessary to have formalized legal exclusions and to continue to keep women out of baseball.

### **Baseball and the “Contact Sport Exemption” of Title IX**

At the high school and collegiate level, there are other institutional factors at play in the push to keep women and girls out of baseball. Though the passage of Title IX was supposed to ensure equality in athletic opportunities and funding for women in publically funded institutions, the so-called “Contact Sports Exemption” does not ensure girls the right to play on male teams in instances where there is no female team, in contact sports like football, baseball, hockey, and others. In 1975, when Title IX was interpreted to include athletics, the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW) specifically allowed schools to deny members of the opposite sex the chance to try out for single-sex teams for any reason, or for no reason at all, if the sport involved was a contact sport.<sup>160</sup> The exact wording in the regulation from the HEW is “[A] recipient may operate or sponsor separate teams for members of each sex where selection for such teams is based upon competitive skill or the activity involved in a contact sport.”<sup>161</sup> The guidelines from

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<sup>160</sup>Greene, Jamal. "Hands Off Policy: Equal Protection and the Contact Sports Exemption of Title IX." *Michigan Journal of Gender and Law* (2005): 131-72. *Hein Online*. Web. 4 Mar. 2012. 134.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid*, 140

the Department of Education concerning Title IX expands upon this point, saying “contact sports under the Title IX regulation include boxing, wrestling, rugby, ice hockey, football, basketball, and other sports in which the purpose or major activity involves bodily contact”.<sup>162</sup> This addition to the scope of Title IX was originally intended to avoid the problems that biological differences between men and women competing against each other could cause in relation to causing injury, but it has since become the primary mechanism for ensuring that women do not infiltrate the major revenue producing sports, like football and basketball.<sup>163</sup> It reflects the deeply engrained, paternalistic notions still held in America about gender, as well as that in the hegemonically masculine world of sports, the most visible and esteemed sports should be reserved for men. When Title IX was initially passed, Senator John Tower, R-Tex., proposed what would later become known as the Tower Amendment, which would provide an exemption from gender inclusion for all revenue producing sports.<sup>164</sup> The goal of this legislation was to keep women out of major college sports such as football and basketball. The rejection of the Tower Amendment led to the creation of the Javits Amendment, which instructed the Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare to “implement regulations for intercollegiate athletics with ‘reasonable provisions considering the nature of particular sports’”, which then led to the creation of the contact

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<sup>162</sup>“Equal Opportunity In Intercollegiate Athletics: Requirements Under Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972.” U.S. Department of Education.Web. 07 Mar. 2012.

<sup>163</sup>Sangree, Suzanne. "Title IX and the Contact Sports Exemption: Gender Stereotypes in a Civil Rights Statute." *Connecticut Law Review* 32.2 (2000): 381-450. *Hein Online*.Web. 4 Mar. 2012. 382.

<sup>164</sup>Furman, Blake J. "Gender Equality in High School Sports: Why There Is a Contact Sports Exemption to Title IX, Eliminating It, and a Proposal for the Future." *Fordham Intellectual Property, Media & Entertainment Law Journal* 17 (2006-2007).*Hein Online*. Web. 29 Mar. 2012.



sports exemption. Even though they use different rationales for excluding women, the Tower Amendment (and later the Javits Amendment) and the contact sports exemption serve the same purpose of allowing coaches and administrators at the top level of collegiate athletics to freely discriminate against women so as to preserve the all-male dominion of the most highly visible college sports.

The primary legal basis for the Contact Sports Exemption was the case of *Heather Sue Mercer v. Duke University*. Mercer walked onto the Duke football team her sophomore year in 1995, becoming the first woman to even tryout, let alone make the team.<sup>165</sup> The school received a great deal of publicity after it announced that Mercer would be on the team, and she appeared on the *Tonight Show*. But once the season started, it became clear that Mercer was not truly a member of the team. She was not allowed to attend pre-season training camp, was not issued a uniform, and was forced to sit in the stands “with her boyfriend” during games.<sup>166</sup> She was also removed from the team’s active roster (the only player to be removed). The next year, Mercer was told that there was no place for her on the team, something that was never done with any male players. Mercer promptly filed suit against the university for sex-based discrimination, as she felt the reason she was cut from the team was purely due to her sex.

Mercer’s discrimination claim was dismissed by a district court, citing the contact sports exemption as justification for Mercer’s dismissal from the team. Since Duke was

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<sup>165</sup>Greene, 133.

<sup>166</sup>Greene, 134.

not obliged to give women an opportunity to play football due to its nature as a contact sport, they were therefore entitled to reverse their decision once Mercer was let on the team.<sup>167</sup> Mercer appealed the decision, and the United States Court of Appeals, Fourth Circuit, reversed the decision and ruled in her favor. The Fourth Circuit Court ruled that Duke would have been free of liability under the contact sports exemption if it had refused to allow Mercer to try out for the team in the first place, but that the exemption did not give Duke the right to discriminate against her due to her sex once she was allowed on the team.<sup>168</sup> The appeals court also awarded Mercer \$2 million in putative damages, and the case would go on to become legal basis for the right to award damages for violations of Title IX.<sup>169</sup>

While it may seem as though the decision was a victory for Mercer and it certainly was in some ways, it also validated the right of institutions to bar women from participation on male contact sports teams in the first place. While women were protected from sex-based discrimination if they were members of an athletic team, the decision did not mean that they had to be given the opportunity to play on those contact sport teams at all. If anything, the contact sports exemption was arguably reinforced as a result of the Mercer case.

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<sup>167</sup> Mercer v. Duke University, Goldsmith. United States Court of Appeals, Fourth Circuit. Mar. 2005. *Justia US Law. Web.* 7 Mar. 2012.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid.

So what is the impact of the Mercer case and the contact sports exemption on the issue of female participation in baseball under Title IX? Simply put, baseball has been classified as a contact sport at various times, and at different levels of the game. Even though baseball is not specifically mentioned in the list of sports included in the contact sports exemption legislation, there have been efforts by youth league officials and at the collegiate level to classify baseball as a contact sport and give coaches the ability to prevent girls from even trying out if they wished. The vagueness of the wording of the legislation, which states that any sport who's "purpose or major activity of which involves contact sport", is what allows sports that have not traditionally been considered contact sports, of which baseball is a prime example, to claim that status and the privileges that accompany it. The other impact of the contact sports exemption on female participation in baseball has been that the successful legal challenges against gender discrimination up to this point have not challenged Title IX or the contact sports exemption, but instead have used the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment of the Constitution. In her book *Female Gladiators: Gender, Law, and Contact Sports in America*, Sarah Fields provides a comprehensive look at these cases, which she calls "the baseball cases". Fields states that "in order to claim protection under the Fourteenth Amendment, a plaintiff must establish that the defendant, if not a direct branch of the state or local government, is acting as a representative of that government".<sup>170</sup> In 1973, ten year old Pamela Magill sued the local youth league in her

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<sup>170</sup>Fields, Sarah K. *Female Gladiators: Gender, Law, and Contact Sport in America*. Urbana, IL: University of

Pennsylvania town, the Avonworth Baseball Conference, for violation of her equal protection rights due to the fact that the league did not allow girls to play. The ABC cited two reasons for barring the participation of girls; first, that baseball was a contact sport, and second, that boys would quit if girls were allowed to play. Though the district court that heard the case ruled that Magill's equal protection rights had not been violated because the ABC was not acting as a representative of the government, the judge wrote in his decision that the ABC was further exempt because baseball was a contact sport. On the topic, the judge said "there is no question that a runner who tries to beat a throw to the plate is frequently blocked by a catcher. The contact is severe if not violent. The directors [of the league] spoke of their concern with wild pitches and, of course, we know the consequences of trying to steal second or third".<sup>171</sup> Clearly, this case is one where cultural perceptions play a large part, because the only reason the judge is objecting to the potential of children being injured playing baseball is because the children in question are female. There was absolutely no concern that boys faced those same dangers.

This decision, and others like it, was nullified shortly after, when Little League opened its ranks to girls, but youth baseball was not the only level of the game that used the contact sports argument to exclude girls. The last of the "baseball cases" came in 1976 when the Tennessee Secondary School Athletic Association tried to bar Jo Ann Carnes from playing on her high school team because the league did not allow coed

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Illinois, 2005. Print. 22.

<sup>171</sup>Fields, 23.

baseball teams due to the sport's contact nature.<sup>172</sup> Carnes sued the league for violation of her equal protection rights and won. The district court found the league's arguments that the rule existed to protect females from the dangers of contact sports and to protect women's sports programs from male participation to be invalid because the court believed that girls were capable of playing baseball and that the lack of a girl's baseball team left Carnes without a team to play on, thus violating her equal protection rights.<sup>173</sup> Though the exclusion was overturned, the case is still significant to this analysis by virtue of the fact that a higher level of baseball, not solely youth leagues, sought to use the contact sports exemption.

### **Conclusion**

As was demonstrated in Chapter Two, baseball has been contested ground for much of its existence, with women and girls continually being excluded and channeled into other pursuits that were seen as more acceptable, namely softball. In the mind of this author, one of the most blatant examples of the continuing gender discrimination in the world of baseball was the creation of Little League softball after the integration of the League, which sent a message that girls still had no place in baseball even if they were now legally allowed to play. The theory of new institutionalism provides a convincing rationale as to why informal methods of exclusion are effective in this case, since Americans still see baseball as the territory of fathers and sons, but not mothers and

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<sup>172</sup>Fields, 27.

<sup>173</sup>Fields, 27.

daughters. It seems that girls have not flooded the nation's youth baseball leagues because there is still a pervasive notion that baseball is for boys and softball is for girls, and that girls need a modified and lessened form of the game to be able to succeed. Though organizations like Little League do not keep statistics on the numbers of female players, it appears as though there is no immediate danger of equal levels of participation in youth baseball among girls and boys. It is also telling that Little League has started a boy's softball division in recent years, but yet there is still no girl's baseball division. It is simply assumed that too few girls would want to play baseball when they have their own world of softball.

There is a cultural perception that men and women should not be battling each other in the most physical of sports, and that women are weaker, slower, and less able than men and should not be put in harm's way. This construction of what is culturally appropriate contributed to the belief that women have no place in contact sports, and helps justify the existence of the contact sports exemption. In other words, "the contact sports exemption is the broadest exception recognized to the overarching goal of equal athletic opportunity."<sup>174</sup>

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<sup>174</sup>Sangree, 382.

## **Chapter 5-Discussion and Conclusions**

The object of this thesis was to answer the following set of questions:

5. How does the existence of softball as the female alternative to baseball reflect or confirm beliefs about gender in America?
6. How has the role of baseball as the national pastime cemented the masculine hegemony evident in baseball?
7. How has Title IX maintained the gender dichotomy between baseball, and how has the institution of Title IX shaped the behavior of American girls and boys in determining whether they will play baseball or softball? More specifically, how has the “contact sports exemption” affected the participation of girls in baseball through Title IX?
8. How have Little League and other youth baseball leagues continued to exclude girls through informal means and cultural expectations?

With those questions in mind, my hypothesis was that the separation of women from baseball began as a response to Victorian ideals about gender, but has been maintained by the masculine hegemony of baseball in its role as the national pastime and its correlation with the concept of the American dream, as well as by Title IX having institutionally shaped the behavior and expectations of Americans and the sporting participation of women since its passage. Additionally, the contact sports exemption of

Title IX has allowed for baseball to remain outside the scope of Title IX and, therefore, girls are not ensured the right to play baseball.

In the case of baseball and softball, Title IX has actually served to reinforce the gender binary in baseball and softball and the masculine hegemony of baseball, contrary to the popular narrative that Title IX has created equality in the American sporting world. While it is certainly true that Title IX has vastly expanded female participation in all sports, the existence of the contact sport exemption has essentially created an environment where certain sports like football, baseball, and basketball are outside the scope of the law, as they fall under a culturally held belief that girls should not be playing contact sports.

Most people in America probably do not even know that softball was not created for the explicit purpose of serving as the female version of baseball, but instead was created by men and for a specific purpose that served people of all classes and both genders. But the very fact that shortly after its creation, softball started to become known as a lesser version of the sport that women were relegated to, since they were not thought to be capable of playing baseball, reflects the deeply embedded gender theory that has persisted in this country since the Victorian era. Additionally, the fact that both men and women play softball today in America, but women have not broken into the ranks of baseball in any meaningful way, speaks to the strength of the masculine hegemony of baseball, much more than in most other sports. But while it may have been antiquated



gender beliefs that first caused the shift of women into the world of softball, many factors since then have combined to keep them there. Instances where women did play baseball were treated as anomalous or downright humorous, and women who played were seen as less feminine, even lesbian. It was as though any woman who would trespass into the masculine world of baseball must have been masculine herself.

The crisis of masculinity during the 19<sup>th</sup> century that led to the proliferation of sports in America, and eventually to the professionalization of sports, is another time in American history where men felt the need to construct an area of life as the purview of men, relegating women to the role of spectator. In order to reclaim the sense of American masculinity that was lost with the Industrial Revolution and the Women's Movement, men needed an arena for the controlled release of manly aggressions. Baseball had been associated with the mythic qualities of the American Dream and the characteristics of what made Americans good citizens, and none of those qualities were things that had been traditionally associated with women. Things like loyalty, ingenuity, hard work, and dedication were seen as the hallmarks of a good citizen, and they were also seen as masculine characteristics. The fact that baseball was also associated with the idea of the American Dream was another factor that excluded women, as, at that time, only men were thought to be able to achieve the kind of success that the American Dream advertised. The efforts of men like Albert Spalding to ensure that baseball would be seen as a natively American sport that reflected the American character, and the masculine ethos that was associated with those qualities, gives some credence to the argument that

there is nothing inherently masculine about baseball, and the sport itself is much more accessible to women than a sport which requires brute strength such as football. Since there is nothing about baseball in and of itself that excludes women based on physical ability since it is a sport where technique and skill are more valuable than pure physical strength or size, baseball elites undertook what was essentially a smear campaign against what they perceived to be the weaker sex. Since the time when baseball began to be professionalized by these men, those in power in the sport have maintained these antiquated gender beliefs for the purpose of maintaining the masculine hegemony of baseball.

The passage of Title IX has made advances for girls and women in countless areas relating to athletics, but in the case of baseball and softball, it has also reinforced the difference between the two sports and the genders that play them. By legislating a difference between baseball and softball, especially with the contact sports exemption, the law is reflective of the cultural environment regarding gender that existed long before the passage of the law. Title IX is not revolutionary in regard to changing perceptions of gender in America, contrary to the popular narrative, because it solidifies the pre-existing gender framework. By maintaining sanctioned and nearly complete exclusion of girls from all levels of baseball through the contact sports exemption, there has developed a deeply engrained cultural perception that baseball was solely the domain of men. America has grown to see softball as a suitable alternative for females, and that girls did not need to play baseball because they had their own sport. Softball was seen as

“separate but equal” so that the masculine hegemony of baseball and its connection to a national identity that spurned any association with femininity could remain intact. If softball was available to girls, they would have no reason to want to trespass into the male world of baseball. The case of Heather Sue Mercer against Duke University gave institutions that sponsor contact sports the right to not even have to give girls the opportunity to try out for sports like football, perpetuating the cultural acceptance that girls do not even have a right to attempt to play sports that are physical and rough. This case shows that the power of Title IX to exclude women from contact sports has emerged as a viable policy due to the administration of the law in such a way through legal precedents, combined with the cultural perception that such exclusion is acceptable given popularly held gender ideals in America today.

So what does all this evidence mean for the future of women and girls in baseball? In the current structure, there is no conceivable way that they will break into the ranks of baseball in the foreseeable future, especially as long as softball is seen as a viable alternative for them to play instead. Since females have been excluded from baseball for centuries, there is no longer a push for inclusion since it has become so culturally engrained that baseball is for men, and not for women. There is not even a need for formal exclusion, because the power of cultural perceptions are enough to keep parents from signing their daughters up for youth baseball leagues, as they recognize that their children would be at such a disadvantage and that there is no future for girls who want to play baseball. So long as baseball is tied so closely to the masculine ethos of

America as our national pastime, there is little hope of overturning the masculine hegemony of baseball.

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