Gender Inequality in Collegiate Athletics: From Pembroke to the Present

By

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Thesis

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Introduction:

My project endeavors to explore the ways in which gender inequity persists within collegiate athletics, despite the implementation of Title IX. I use Brown University as a case study to analyze how issues from the past continue in the present, particularly around qualitative elements of the program that Title IX cannot address. Through researching the history and presenting the experiences of current athletes, I have seen sexism’s continuity in comments around appearance, particularly for women of color, media coverage, the intrusion of men in areas like coaching and the general lack of respect afforded to the women’s teams. I also noticed that in some cases, efforts to create more equality have harmed women’s autonomy and further entrenched gender inequity. Experiences of sexism relayed to me in these interviews range from subtle microaggressions to overt instances. Before sharing some of these experiences though, I want to explain my purpose, the climate of this university, and my own positionality in relaying these stories.

Sports provide individuals with an outlet for stress and other negative emotions, a place to excel, a social community and a generally enjoyable experience. They are sometimes the only place that an individual feels truly happy. The value of sports and what they mean to an athlete cannot be overstated. But like any other facet of the world we live in, power structures mar and pervade athletic programs. The meaning and enjoyment an individual can derive from such a valuable experience is directly impacted by their identity. Individuals who seek to increase the value of sports must acknowledge its current shortcomings and restructure its focus. Reform should move its focus from simply winning to centering the needs and strengths of the athletes, who are real people and often sidelined in something ostensibly meant for them.
My attempt to analyze and call out these inequities is therefore an attempt to bolster the important benefits that athletics provide. I do, however, wholeheartedly acknowledge that Brown University, particularly the student body who does not participate in sports, does not always celebrate its athletes, often questioning their place at the university and rarely showing any enthusiasm for the program. While recognizing this climate and potential pushback from the athletic sphere, we must still evaluate the shortcomings of our program to make it even more meaningful. If we acknowledge, primarily but not exclusively in this case, sexism’s influence on athletics, we can increase its ability to provide a meaningful space for those of marginalized identities. But we can only make these strides to strengthen athletics and its meaning if we look critically at these important programs and ultimately strive to remedy injustices at various levels, regardless of how severe they appear.

I reference the history of Pembroke College during narrative pieces with athletes to convey how these problems are rooted in, and the result of, the university’s history. One cannot dismiss past issues simply because they took place in a different time. By speaking with current individuals, it became incredibly evident that the racism women of color faced during the time of Pembroke has not disappeared. If anything, the growth of the number of people of color at the university and the resulting increase in interactions between athletes of color and their coaches expanded racist incidents.

Furthermore, Title IX largely addressed the quantitative discrepancies, primarily financial, between genders. However, this does not negate the qualitative issues, like playing equipment and media attention, that began during Pembroke’s athletic program and persist in the present.
Similarly, body image issues look different, now that many teams encourage women to gain muscles and be strong. However, these conversations still impose judgement upon women’s bodies in ways that parallel conversations about how female athletes should not appear too manish, despite the inherent paradox. These parallels that I noticed through my work indicate that Pembroke College’s athletic program’s flaws persist in the present, despite supposed improvement, and indicate larger issues around gender. In order to begin the work of redress, those analyzing these situations must understand where these problems come from to create effective solutions.

I would also like to acknowledge my positionality as someone who does not play a collegiate sport. I participated in track, competing in shot put, discus and pole vault, and cross country in high school. But, I have not personally experienced what it is like to be a varsity athlete on this campus. I will, therefore, never truly know what it is like to firsthand interact with these systems at the university level. But in some ways, my lack of exposure provides me distance from, and ensuing clarity towards, these issues. I am not ensnared in these systems and am able to see a fuller and less partial picture of athletics here. Obviously my relationship to athletics provides a tradeoff, but I believe that my lack of participation will serve as an asset in relaying other individuals’ stories.

And along with attention to the individual, it is important that a reader recognizes these stories as unique experiences. They are not salacious anecdotes, but rather the lived experiences of people who care deeply about and engage nearly every day with their sport and athletics more broadly. As such, I strive to both relay their stories and feelings with accuracy and make them my primary focus throughout this project. Information, like names and year, have been omitted
in order to respect their privacy and needs. Their individual experiences are not necessarily representative of athletics at the university as a whole, but provide important insight into the ways that inequities like sexism and racism manifest.

I would also like to address why I elected to focus on the accounts of athletes, rather than the administration or general student body. Many of the women I interviewed thanked me for listening and caring about their stories, particularly since they often felt like this was not the case when they spoke with administrators. These conversations made me realize that my driving interest in my work is to provide emotional space and an audience to female athletes. These individuals have experienced unaddressed harm, so one of the greatest strengths of my writing is the ability to give them the space they are constantly denied. As a result, I minimized the inclusion of administrators, coaches, male athletes and the general student body. While a reader may gain further elucidation of the greater athletic structure, I believe that these accounts would drown out and weaken the narratives of the women who are routinely ignored. I see the objective of giving women their denied space being most fully realized by focusing on their stories, and minimizing other accounts. I believe that it is imperative that my work actively uplift the voices of these women by focusing exclusively on their stories.

I hope that this work will impart to a reader the scope of inequity that exists and inspire them to take steps to increase the ability of athletics to provide value and meaning for people of marginalized gender identities. After all, advancement can only be made when we are willing to engage with and address flaws. Athletics has so much to offer an individual and provides great value, especially when all people are given equal access to it. I urge the reader to embody this
mindset as they conscientiously engage with the stories of the university’s athletic past and modern athletes on this campus.

Chapter 1:

The Brown Women’s basketball team played poorly against their competition, the Princeton Tigers, on March 8th 2019. The team did not communicate well with one another, attempted several poorly executed three pointers and appeared even more disheartened than their lackluster crowd of scattered students and a few families. They lost the game 88-66. It was the second loss of the season against the Tigers with a more than 19 point deficit. They felt defeated, not just in the score, but psychologically and knew what was coming the moment they stepped off of the court into the privacy of the locker room.

Once out of sight and earshot of the crowd, their coach allegedly tore into them. According to one athlete on the team at the time, she said nothing about the game but instead gratingly declared, “You guys can do whatever you fucking want. We are not going to the WBI (a basketball invitational that would replace the team’s spring break).” Nothing about her comments appeared to be constructive as they seemed to be intended to shame the women. However, this language made little impression on the fatigued team, especially as they were allegedly routinely lambasted as “shitheads” and “pussies” when they played poorly.¹ And under her supposedly cruel, emotionally abusive and manipulative leadership, the team faltered often and the losses continued to accumulate.

¹ Goldstein, “Brown University Band Will Not Perform at Women’s Basketball Games in Protest of Head Coach.”
The inherent power dynamics and complicated nature of athletics, particularly for women, necessitate legal measures to protect female athletes. Title IX, an important law, elucidates the measures Brown University, and other educational bodies, must comply with in regards to gender equity. This law is essential in protecting women’s rights in educational settings as women have often been denied equal treatment to their male peers, and prior to the law, had no recourse. When legislators initially passed the 14th Amendment, granting former male slaves the right to citizenship and prohibiting discrimination on the basis of race, they did not include gender-based discrimination. Various court cases in the interim denied the Fourteenth Amendment’s ability to grant women and individuals of marginalized genders the same rights as men.

Successful 14th amendment cases involving gender discrimination had to wait almost a full century. One of the first instances of this was under Craig v. Boren, when the court deemed that an Oklahoma statute establishing a higher drinking age for men was unconstitutional for its unequal treatment of gender. Even a court case that acknowledged the Fourteenth Amendment’s role in gender did so to abet men’s rights, rather than women and people of other marginalized genders.

While women gained legal ground using the amendment, the style of analysis stymied constitutional progress. Court cases involving gender use an analysis known as intermediate

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2 The history that follows primarily addresses Title IX’s genesis and implication for athletics. For a more general understanding of Title IX, please refer to *The Transformation of Title IX: Regulating Gender Equality in Education* by R. Shep Melnick, and *Title IX: The Transformation of Sex Discrimination in Education* by Elizabeth Kaufer Busch and William E. Thro.

3 “Doesn’t the 14th Amendment Already Guarantee Women Equal Rights Under the Law?”

4 “Craig v. Boren.”
scrutiny, rather than the more rigorous strict scrutiny applied to cases involving race. Whereas strict scrutiny uses a “compelling government interest” and mandates that it is “narrowly tailored,” intermediate scrutiny evaluates whether there is an “important government interest” and if the law is “substantially related to that interest.” The “substantial” classification has no hard definition and therefore allows for variations in court cases surrounding gender.

The vagueness of the language prompted activists to envision an amendment that addressed gender, spurring the creation of the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA). Alice Paul first introduced the amendment in 1923 as the “Lucretia Mott Amendment” after the noted feminist activist. The amendment, which called for equal rights for men and women throughout the U.S., found itself on the political platforms of the Republican and Democratic parties in the 1940s. After modification in language and name, the ERA gained traction in the 1970s and passed the Senate and House of Representatives.

However, activists faced difficulty in getting state support during the seven year period for state ratification. As the deadline drew near, activists orchestrated a march to advocate for more time. While they gained this extension for the ratification process, the ERA still fell short of the requisite number of states for ratification. It has since been reintroduced every year and starting in 2018 has gained additional state ratification. Until the ERA passes, codified measures such as Title IX are essential in protecting the rights of women.

Title IX reached prominence and was implemented in 1972. This time period presented a maelstrom of activism around gender discrimination, spurred in part by the ERA and attention to the pay gap. Activists, seeking to understand where the inequity started, recognized the role

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5 “Intermediate Scrutiny.”
6 “The Equal Rights Amendment.”
schools play in future earnings. They believed that allowing unequal opportunity in academic settings kept those of marginalized identities, in their specific focus women, from being competitive students and eventually employees. If a woman could not access a math class because of sexist norms, she would not be eligible to take on a well-paying mathematically focused job like being an accountant.

Several advocacy groups addressed this inequity by filing class action lawsuits against the colleges, universities and the federal government that they alleged were holding women back. Their efforts were well directed as during this time period only 8% of women aged 19 or older had graduated from college, compared to 14% of men. Furthermore, many institutions outright denied women access to higher education and those that did admit them required higher testing scores and imposed restrictive measures, like early curfews.

With these clear indicators of gender discrimination and ensuing unrest, Congress passed Title IX on June 23rd, 1972. The act states that federally supported programs cannot discriminate based on gender and grounds its constitutionality in the Fourteenth Amendment. Title IX does not target individuals who have committed gender-based harm, but rather requires that schools have formalized methods to address gender-based issues. The law ensures that schools provide an avenue for a student to report an issue around gender discrimination and receive support, have the resources to file a civil lawsuit against their violator and pursue criminal prosecution. Schools only face penalties under Title IX when they possess knowledge and control of a situation and when their actions result in what is tantamount to subjecting a student to gender based discrimination. This measure sought to avoid federal resources supporting discriminatory

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7 “Title IX.”
8 “Equal Access to Education: Forty Years of Title IX .”
practices; in instances where schools did not comply, these schools not only risked legal action, but also lost any governmental federal funding they were receiving. Title IX also provided individuals effective action against biased practices, like keeping women from “men’s subjects,” denying them jobs and restricting the hours they were allowed to be out. This law proved especially important to elevating women’s and people of other marginalized gender’s rights since the application of the Fourteenth Amendment provided varied results.9

Title IX represents an important stride for women in schools, particularly in regards to athletics. Historically sports were for men. Schools saw women as too dainty and feminine to partake in the aggressive world of athletics that would surely harm women or worse yet, result in unladylike behavior. Many individuals even believed that women, after starting menstruation, could not participate in athletics and academics because they had a finite amount of energy that was lower than their male peers.10 Initially, schools barred women from participating in intercollegiate competitions. They instead confined them to intramural games that they often did not record, an indication of their perceived frivolity and regarded as solely social ventures. The first intercollegiate sports team, a basketball team, emerged at Smith College in 1892.11 This development led to the demand for more female intercollegiate athletics as women wanted more opportunity to play in competitive settings. Further athletic opportunities materialized, like the creation of more basketball teams, and the genesis of other teams sports. However, the university selectively offered these programs based on their desire, rather than readily available status of men’s sports.

10 Academy, “A History of Women in Sport Prior to Title IX.”
11 Ibid.
Eighty years later, Title IX satisfied the need for greater and more well-supported opportunities for women’s sports by codifying equal opportunity for men and women. It required that between male and female students, universities provide equal provision and maintenance of equipment and supplies, opportunity for funding per student, scheduling of games and practice times, travel expenses, opportunity for coaching and academic assistance, locker rooms, practice and game facilities, housing and dining services and facilities and publicity. Title IX acknowledges that circumstances, like a lack of a female counterpart for a sport, the cost of certain fields and other varying factors may skew expenditures. However, they recognize that this is the result of a specific sport’s needs and not discriminatory practices. Likewise, certain years one gender may receive more recruitment opportunities because of specific team needs, rather than biases. Title IX provides important clarification on what schools are required to provide in order to ensure that students are not discriminated against based upon gender.¹²

Furthermore, a three pronged text exists to more succinctly assess the actions of educational bodies. It first asks whether intercollegiate opportunities are equal for men and women, considering their population sizes. Then, for historically underrepresented genders, it asks the university to explore if it has historically and continuously provided opportunities responsive to the students of that gender’s interests and abilities. This measure does not necessitate an educational institution add a certain number of teams or remedies gender based inequities in a finite amount of time; rather it is satisfactory to be making documented strides towards equity. If this is not the case, the university must then demonstrate that the interests and abilities of the underrepresented gender have been fully and effectively accommodated by the

¹² “Title IX 1979 Policy Interpretation on Intercollegiate Athletics.”
present program. The regulation seeks to provide women opportunity, not to be an affirmative action program. Brown University, and other universities, must keep these principles in mind when crafting and altering their athletic programs to comply with the law. However, this has not always been the case.

Chapter 2:

The University looked to cut athletic costs in 1991. On the chopping block stood varsity women’s volleyball and gymnastics, and varsity men’s water polo and golf. Unlike the lucrative and well followed football team, few noticed the presence of these relatively small, fringe teams; the administration, under the command of Athletic Director Dave Roach, thought that it would be seamless to ax these programs at the varsity level. They could still exist, but would instead be classified as club sports, thereby losing university funding. For men’s water polo, there would be little impact. Many of the players were also on the varsity swim team and would retain their access to varsity resources. Both women’s teams faced far more precarious economic situations. However, the university did not see cutting these teams as a violation of Title IX. The goal was, after all, to save money, not to discriminate against women, and they had cut equal numbers of teams from both genders.¹⁴

The resulting scorn of the jilted women’s volleyball players and gymnasts blindsided the university. Michael Goldberger, who worked in the administration for 38 years and served as the liaison between athletics and admissions during this time, said, "We always felt at Brown that we

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¹³ “Clarification of Intercollegiate Athletics Policy Guidance.”
¹⁴ “At Brown, Title IX Brings Memories Of Historic Lawsuit.”
had done a great job in terms of providing opportunities for women in college athletics.”\textsuperscript{15} He cited the fact that in 1991, even with the cuts, the university still offered the second most athletic teams for women in the Ivy League.\textsuperscript{16}

However, even before the programs were officially defunded, the university afforded women far fewer resources than many of their male counterparts. Gymnasts recount having to sew teammates’ leotards before meets and one particularly horrific bus ride in brutal New England weather where the bus was broken and the door remained open the entire trip. Cathy Fulford, then coach of the women’s volleyball team, recalled that the men’s basketball team would kick the women’s team off the court. Tension brewed between the administration and the under-resourced women’s teams; being wholly defunded finally pushed the women to legal action.

Amy Cohen, gymnast and class of 1992, and 12 of her peers sought legal action against the University after being cut from varsity status and contending with the lack of funding. The volleyball team scraped by on donations, a hallmark of the Pembroke athletic days. The gymnastics team floundered without funding, losing its coaching staff, ability to competitively recruit and even find competitors. Their choice was either to passively watch their athletic haven of gymnastics crumble or to sue the school.

Trial Lawyers for Justice filed suit against the University in April of 1992 and Lynette Labinger took up the helm as representation for Cohen. They alleged that the University’s inadequate athletic opportunities, further entrenched by the loss of the gymnastics and volleyball teams, represented a violation of Title IX. Cohen and her peers, the plaintiffs in the case, claimed

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{16} Labrie, “A Numbers Game.”
that the university violated the law by not ensuring that “the selection of sports and levels of competition effectively accommodate the interest and abilities of members of both sexes.”\textsuperscript{17}

While the case was nominally being taken up because of recent cuts from the university, the program had been flawed for years and legal action sought to address this greater injustice.

In a ruling in the first district court of appeals, in 1993, the University was found in violation of Title IX. Under Title IX, a university must provide substantially proportionate opportunities in athletics for men and women. Men and women’s opportunities must reflect student body composition and show continuous expansion in competitive opportunity, or they must show that they have met the interest and ability of current students. The University need not meet all of these requirements, but at least demonstrate that they meet one of the above.

Nominally, the university appeared to support gender parity in athletics. Data showed that between full varsity teams, those receiving funds from the university, and donor-funded teams, those that survived off of donations but competed at the varsity level, there were an equal number of teams being offered between the genders at 17 apiece. However, the available spots for each gender painted a different picture. In the 1991 season, there were 342 spots for women, representing 38.13% of the varsity sports population, versus 555 spots for men, or roughly 61.87% of varsity athletes. The school population itself was 51.14% female and 48.86% male.\textsuperscript{18}

Aside from the abysmal qualitative elements of the women’s program, created by the unequal funding, women found far fewer opportunities to even get involved. The university failed this part of the test with the clear imbalance between the school population and varsity athletic spots.

\textsuperscript{17} “Cohen v. Brown University, 879 F. Supp. 185 (D.R.I. 1995).”
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid.
The defendant countered that the gender breakdown of the student body does not accurately reflect proportionality. The university could not be held responsible for the composition of teams as they did not control who joined. However, experts testified that athletic teams are closely dictated by the coaches and athletic staff. One could therefore expect the university to have some hand in the gender balance. The university also argued that participation rates should look at filled and unfilled spots. They claimed that many teams held a higher capacity than was currently reflected in their team composition; they stated that this could be seen in historical team highs on women’s teams and by looking at male counterparts to women’s teams. Both of these factors, however, did not reflect the actual opportunities afforded to female athletes, and the court, therefore, rejected them.

For the second prong of the test, the university had increased women’s athletic teams since the introduction of Title IX. This expansion was not continuous. Since the 1970s, the University had added only women’s track and skiing. Rates of student body participation remained fairly consistent since the 1970s, indicating stagnancy in engagement.19 This fact, coupled with the decrease in opportunity, indicated that while there was some increase in opportunity, the university did not create continuous development and therefore did not sufficiently meet the requirements of this prong.

Lastly, the university failed the final prong by not meeting the interests of female athletes, as demonstrated by the bereft volleyball and gymnastics players. The law does not compel the University to make teams. However, when there is evident and adequate skill and interest within the underrepresented gender, the university must meet this need. The previously

19 Ibid.
functioning gymnastics team proved their interest with their cartwheel fundraising events in an attempt to maintain the team. Likewise, the volleyball team showed their athletic capacity with their 1989-90 Ivy League Championship. The university was therefore confronted with both the interest and skillset to create and maintain these athletic teams, but instead cut them.

Coaches, athletes and experts affirmed this fact with their court testimony. “Digit” Murphy, then varsity women’s hockey coach, took the stand to extol the virtue of increasing female opportunities. She had plenty of experience as the winningest women’s hockey coach at a Division 1 school and the coach of 7 Olympians. Instead of being met with esteem and respect, she felt intimidated by the university. She explained, “You knew who was on one side of the issue and who was on the other side of the issue. It really was a men vs. women issue that really didn't have to be that way. And it was hard. I remember in 1994 being seven months pregnant, and being on the stand, testifying against my employer.” Not only was there a clear desire for athletics not being met, but the male administrators appeared to meet those speaking out about the issue with hostility.

The university would go on to fight the case, expounding needless energy on contesting rather than addressing the issue. After being ruled in violation of Title IX, the university attempted to appeal the lower court’s decision in 1995. In 1997, the first circuit upheld the lower court’s ruling that the university had transgressed by violating Title IX; in the same year, the supreme court rejected the university’s petition. Arlene Gorton vocalized women athletes’ frustration with her observation that “…the money could have gone into the programs, and it

20 Ibid.
21 “Brown University.”
22 Littlefield, “A Title IX Trailblazer Rebuilds.”
confounds me why it didn't go into the programs to bring equity, rather than fighting the case."\(^{23}\) After all, all of the legal proceedings cost the university nearly $2 million dollars, or just under the money they attempted to save with the cuts in the first place.\(^ {24}\)

The administration, after losing, proceeded to construct the issue as one of men vs. women. The courts provided suggestions and guidelines for rectifying the program, but ultimately did not prescribe action. As a result, the university had the option to increase women’s programs and/or the number of spots offered per team, or cut men’s programs and/or limit the number of spots offered. Administrators said they were going to offer more women’s spots, but threatened that if the court did not approve the plan, it would result in serious cuts to men’s athletics. As Gorton pointed out, it was “rhetoric intended to cloud the issue and arouse emotions.”\(^ {25}\)

Ultimately, the university did not have to cut any men’s opportunities despite their constructed rivalry between the two genders. Instead, the crew team introduced a women’s lightweight program, thanks to the recent expansion of the crew house. The equestrian team added 31 spots to their roster.\(^ {26}\) Other teams also faced rapid growth, to bridge the deficiency. The university finally began to make steps towards increasing women’s opportunities with no harm to men’s.

While the case is technically settled and the university has taken action to better the athletic situation, the ramifications still persist. Labinger, representative to Cohen, receives annual reports from the university. She continues to assess whether or not they are upholding the

\(^{23}\) “At Brown, Title IX Brings Memories Of Historic Lawsuit.”

\(^{24}\) Labrie, “A Numbers Game.”

\(^{25}\) Ibid.

\(^{26}\) “96-114 (Title IX Compliance Plan).”
letter of the law. As recently as the 2010s, she found the university to be in violation. She and administrators have made slight tweaks to the program to remedy this issue in order to provide women the opportunity they are due. Great strides have been made and continue to be in order to create a more equitable athletic program.

However, less tangible and non-codified forms of injustice continue to persist in athletics. The university has largely addressed the issues around funding and available spots on teams thanks to the court case. But women in sports still receive both subtle and blatant indicators that they are valued less than their male peers. In the 1990s, Arlene Gorton noted that alumni would come to the athletic office where she worked after the football team would lose. They would lament the poor athletic weekend the Bears had, while ignoring the fact that the women’s teams had all won their respective games. The lack of care for these teams persists in the present in regards to game attendance, media coverage, in which several women’s teams have noted the lack of attention they receive, quality of coaching staff and other indicators of inequality. The University and Labinger monitor more hard indicators of inequity, like funding and athletic spots, but soft factors continue to the present.

Even Murphy, a champion of women during the court case, could not crack the glass ceiling. Murphy’s female partner, Aronda Kirby, encouraged her to interview for the men’s head coach position for the 2009 season. She had, after all, pushed the women’s team to great heights with her enthusiasm, hockey intelligence and aggression. She was more than qualified to take over the men’s team. Phil Estes, then head coach of football, concurred and even told her that she had done an amazing job at the interview. The University did not award her the position. It was

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27 Labrie, “A Numbers Game.”
likely a conglomeration of homophobia and sexism that kept Murphy from making history as the first woman to head a men’s team. The head coach of the women’s Boston University hockey team lamented the injustice of her being passed up for the opportunity. He is one of countless men in head coaching positions for women’s athletic teams. The court case remedied important issues, but could not, and still does not, guarantee equity for the women who have devoted their lives to playing and coaching athletics.

Chapter 3:

Many students at Brown University groan at the prospect of trekking all the way from Caswell dorm to Alumnae Hall for a 9 A.M. It is simply too far away and feels entirely sequestered from the rest of the campus. That was, however, the point of the area elected to serve as the location of the Women’s College at its opening in 1891. Women were secondary to the men and the physical distance between the women and the far larger men’s campus ensured that this would remain the case.

The student who does make the onerous 10-minute journey might entirely pass by and miss the significance of the building that once served as “the chapel-gymnasium-study-philosophy-dance hall.” Many university students do not think deeply

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28 For the history of Pembroke College discussed in chapters 3 through 6, few sources offer a thorough overview of the history of Pembroke College athletics prior to its merger with Brown University athletics. For that reason, I rely primarily on a single source, Kaufman’s “The Search for Equity: Women at Brown University, 1891-1991,” for the vast majority of the information in these chapters relating to the history of Pembroke College athletics. When other sources are used, they are indicated in additional footnotes. More precise information regarding specific page numbers that relate to the specific historical events and conclusions were unavailable to me when I went to retrieve and confirm them at the end of the semester due to closures tied to covid-19.
about the northern part of campus, but it is rife with a history whose effect lingers on the university’s current athletic programming. It is after all, the place in which the women's physical education program, inequity and all, started.

Looking around the Pembroke campus now, a student unknowingly stands at the focal point of entrenched gender norms and sexism. The Women’s College, renamed Pembroke College in 1928, created women’s physical education around deeply sexist understandings of female undergraduates. While they recognized that an athletics program provided a means of social bonding and raised self-esteem, the men who initiated this program did it at the behest of Edward Clarke.

Clarke, a Harvard physician, stated in 1872 that women in higher education would face permanent physical, emotional and sexual damage because their bodies were too feminine, which obviously meant a perilous weakness that needed to be addressed. The “identical education” of women and men was a “crime before God and humanity, that physiology protests against, and that experience weeps over.”29 The resulting remedy to women’s fragility included regular medical exams, lectures on hygiene and physiology, given by the utmost knowledgeable individuals of women’s health: men in the late 1800s, and a requirement of two years of physical education in an obviously exclusively female environment. The program prescribed gymnastics, primarily to help with posture, and required outdoor recreation. These men sought to ensure women would still fit into the norms of femininity, especially around domestic duties, after the draining and potentially ruinous experience of higher education; athletics were a means to ensuring that women fit their gender norms and the program’s construction reflects these desires.

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29 Zschoche, “Dr. Clarke Revisited: Science, True Womanhood, and Female Collegiate Education.”
In 1897, the women’s college established the Department of Physical Culture and elected Mabel Potter, class of 1897, to head it. There were minimal financial resources, though, to ensure the success of this program. With what resources it did have, though, this department followed conventional understandings of women’s athletics programs. If one visits the current student gym, the Nelson, a few blocks east of the Pembroke campus, one of the posture mirrors used for assessing one of the indicators of (feminine, heterosexual and antiquated) health, is still hung on the wall; a relic of a different world. However, at a time when society did not even widely produce athletic shoes designed for women, it was revolutionary to have a woman in charge of an athletics program. Since men would never deign to make the lengthy trip to Pembroke to oversee a measly women’s program, it was only natural that a woman would be at the helm. The lack of regard for the Women’s College actually gave women greater jurisdiction.

A few steps left, one ends up behind the red bricked building on Meeting Street, known always as Pembroke Hall. This individual now stands where the extent of organized athletics existed in the early 1900s for the women of Pembroke College. Students currently sunbathe on the patchwork grass, taking in the last dredges of the warmth of the sun and shivering only slightly from the encroaching fall chill; but at this location in 1907 existed the only two tennis courts for the over 200 female students. Women showed greater enthusiasm for organized sports than they did for their compulsory physical education, making the lack of resources more crushing. In fact, one of the first instances of student action against a sedentary administration took place over tennis. The administration made no motion to grant students access to organized athletics, so the women formed a Tennis Association in 1900. Two years later, the administration

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30 Tricard, *American Women’s Track and Field.*
31 Goodwin and Smith, *The Jews of Rhode Island.*
finally responded by creating the Athletic Association. Women often dealt with less than their male peers, especially in the realm of athletics, but refused to succumb to this inequity.

One can more fully appreciate the women’s activist mindset when one meanders over to the campus building with one of the most difficult names to pronounce, Smith-Buonanno Hall. Current students dash to and fro the building, ducking into oddly shaped rooms that hardly seem like they should have been conceptualized to begin with, least of all utilized for classrooms; but architects hardly intended these buildings to be used for educational purposes as they formerly served as locker rooms, offices and athletic spaces for the women of Pembroke.

After recognizing that Pembroke Hall was serving too many purposes (chapel, study area and dance hall to name a few) the university began to fundraise for a new facility and more land in 1904. Many wealthy alumni whose names pockmark the campus, like Stephen Metcalf and his sister Eliza Metcalf Radeke and Frank Sayles, donated hefty sums towards this goal. The university was unwilling to put enough of its own money towards the women’s program, though, leaving the women short of the necessary funds to create the new athletic space. The administration instead focused its funds on building up the men’s campus to include the Van Wickle Gates, Faunce Hall and the John Carter Brown Library. However, the women did not concede defeat. They, instead, raised funds through charging admission to performances by faculty, students and alumnae and were able to bridge the financial gap.

After its construction, the building went on to house offices, a large hall, a resting room (a room with wash areas and couches intended to provide a moment of respite for the horribly frail and post-physical exercise ruined woman), a hall for study, recitation rooms and a basement

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32 “Brown: A Timeline.”
with dressing rooms, bathrooms, lockers and shower baths. In 1907, at the height of the bowling craze, alumna donated money to build bowling lanes. The current study area outside of the large lecture hall has basketball court markings, remnants of its time as the practice space of the team, which was founded in 1910. The then expanded gymnasium space allowed the school to require women to complete four years of physical education, rather than the initial two years, starting in 1916.

The gym expansion did not, however, result in greater opportunities for women to engage in intercollegiate play. While a poll in 1916 reveals that a slight majority of women at the college believed women should have the ability to play other schools, the school partnered with few outside organizations. Quite often, many competitors were younger women who came from churches, high schools and YWCAs, as the university was not concerned with providing competitive opportunities. Viewers regarded several of these competitions, like the baseball game played between Wheaton and the Women’s College in 1928, as a spectacle rather than a serious athletic event. In fact, many administrators openly scorned the idea of creating a competitive program because they believed that behavior to be exclusively male and therefore unladylike. Societal norms demanded that women have athletic and academic success, but this athletic prowess had to conform to feminine ideals to appease the male administrators of Brown University and the indoctrinated female staff.

These arbitrary restrictions extended into nearly every aspect of women’s athletics, including the ways in which women presented themselves. Student publications decried the idea of women being Amazonian, brawny and overly boisterous. These attributes stridently defied expected norms. It was even more disastrous to be caught presenting or behaving in these ways
in front of men. The Student Government Organization, a body run by undergraduate women, forbade women from wearing sneakers, knickers, gymnasium bloomers, and athletic sweaters in classrooms on the men’s campus or in the center of the city, all locations where men might be, unless on an athletic outing. Athletics were principally masculine, and therefore unladylike. Since the progenitor of female athletics intended for sports to be a means of counteracting the pernicious effects of education on women’s bodies, sports should be kept discreet like other body maintenance practices. Women were deeply entrenched in these gender norms and criticized one another, limiting the ability of athletics to provide a wholly expressive realm for women.

Men played a dominant role in creating athletics and did so to fit their normative understandings of femininity. They saw women as far too weak for real competition and the athletic opportunities and resources, monetary and otherwise, at the time reflected this belief. As a result of these stringent norms, men and women held deeply rooted beliefs about women’s physical presentation that harmed the ability for true self-expression and caused the female athletic world to be considered weak and inferior to the masculine world.

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“Did you play since your hometown is known for the sport?”

“No” I meekly, and uncomfortably respond to the lacrosse coach who is 15 minutes late for our interview in McMeehan Gym (she is coming from a meeting with the football coach-- a former classmate when they were both athletes at the university). She is bubbly, but evidently a little wary of me in the way she keeps trying to discern my background and any potential motives I have for probing her sport.

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“Well did you watch then?”

“No, I did not,” I again mumble, but try to appear more at ease with her line of questions, while processing the reversal of roles that is taking place. I am prepared to ask questions, not to be questioned.

“Well then you must have been a little rebellious,” a sly smile on the word rebellious and a slight chuckle intimate the idea that we are just two women in on a small joke; but I infer by the way that she lingers a little too long on the word that she is actually trying to root out the veracity of the statement. Am I here to betray her and twist her words in order to carry out some perverse vengeance I have against her sport and team as a non-player and non-spectator from a fanatic hometown?

Of course not, but in the athletic climate of Brown University it appears prudent to be cautious. Individuals have lofted allegations against the University in nearly all realms, including sports. As a woman in an important athletic role, she must feel as though she is always in a precarious situation that requires the constant sensation of being on guard and at attack.

We seat ourselves in the hallway of the gym intended for athletes, in plush chairs accompanied by a large table that feel awfully out of place, to begin the interview. I wonder if we are here so that way no one can allege that she has said anything incriminating since it is so open. Her body posture, on alert, sitting very forward in her chair, with a practiced smile, certainly does not dissuade me of the notion.

After I ask my first question, she pauses, and then with the same practiced smile, asks me what exactly I am looking for from our interview, even though I have already provided her an overview in my introductory email. Again, the sense that she is telling me she can give me what I
want, as long as I play fair, seems to linger intangibly in the air. I reiterate my desire to talk about gender parity in sports and mirror back her same practiced smile in order to conceal my festering discomfort. I feel as though I am being appraised and inspected. Most of what she ends up expressing to me is coded, as though she deftly crafts her statement to avoid any and all potential hazards that they might impose for her and her sport.

But I cannot really blame her for her veiled and staged statements and body language. I would guess that it is after all how she so successfully transitioned from being a student athlete at a school that, according to many of its athletes, rarely supports its female athletes, to the head coach of an athletic program at the young age of 25. That and the ability to have a thick skin and believe that women can achieve anything when they just want it hard enough and push for it, a la tech mogul Sheryl Sandberg. If you can convince yourself that all equal treatment requires is a can-do attitude, then you can grin and bear it through anything that the university imposes upon you. It sure has imposed a lot. This mentality is not all that different from the perseverance of the Pembroke women who were denied monetary aid by the university and overcame this setback through fundraising.

In this one sport alone, the head coach personally worked to ensure that her team receives the same media attention as the men’s team. She prompts her colleagues in charge of the university’s sports media accounts to remember things like posting about the women’s game times, or promoting their success. As she said, “We actually have to do extra work around female student athletes to get them celebrated.”34 One individual in her office is exclusively devoted to publicizing the team on social media, a makeshift way of compensating for the media

34 Ibid.
deficit. However, the men’s twitter page boasts 13,500 followers to the women’s 1,500. It seems incredulous that a women’s varsity team at an Ivy League institution has had to advocate so ferociously to receive the same, and quite often even less, publicity as its male counterpart, but it is even more astounding that the head coach is forced to divert attention from her job of actually coaching to ensure that her team is receiving the publicity they deserve.

But as she shrugs, again in a way that seems nearly practiced and to harbor some cognitive dissonance with her reality, she mentions her “willingness to do some of the legwork.”

It is ridiculous that she claims it is a matter of “willingness,” hinting at personal volition, while also outlining all of the outrageous steps and energy she has had to put into something that should be so simple, and is, for male peers. This treatment is not unlike the women of Pembroke who could not even be featured in the Brown Daily Herald and voiced their contempt for this disrespect in an Op-Ed; the only real difference is that now because women have nominally gained equality, there’s less overt grumbling about this treatment. It seems that bubbling under her practiced veneer is the ability to suppress any and all rage at the inequity so as not to be controversial and attract negative attention.

Worse yet is the insinuation that women’s sheer incompetence at demanding attention is the reason for the media inequity. When I ask about unequal game attendance, as the women show up to support their male peers, but do not receive the same courtesy, she appears frustrated. But not at the men who do not attend. Instead, her annoyance seems directed at the women whom she believes to be soft and the root of this male absence. As she expresses to me, knitted brows and a slightly raised tone and more rapid speech that suggests how irksome she finds this,

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women need to demand male attendance and should not be showing up to men’s games without the promise of reciprocity. It’s as simple as “sitting them [an individual on the men’s team] down and having a conversation with their buddy.”\textsuperscript{36}

After all, when she was on the team, there was an agreement that her team would go to football games and the men from the football team would come to cheer her and her teammates on during their games. This woman who is meant to empower and inspire her athletes towards success blames them for the lack of respect others grant them. Just as women “earn” the treatment they receive when they dress a certain way, these women have supposedly earned their unequal treatment by being weak and undemanding. However, if women, always posited as the inferior, have the wherewithal to support their male peers, men and their inherent superiority can surely do the same without being asked.

And this mentality is certainly not absent from issues around her team’s largely white and homogeneously skinny composition. When I inquire about shifting dynamics on the team, especially around race (another carefully crafted question, in line with her veiled affectation) she provides a borderline dismissive, slight smile, lacking even the concern to show any forceful emotion. She placidly states that “Yeah. We try, we lose those recruiting battles. You know, it's something that has always been in the back of my mind as awareness.”\textsuperscript{37} Of course, she notes, they are not exclusively recruiting white students. But also, she leads me to believe that she takes no culpability for the lack of racial diversity, nor believes that there is anything different that she or the team can do to attract these women of color.

\textsuperscript{36} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{37} Ibid.
It is not her fault that they picked other universities over Brown. In order to “prove” her point that she and the team have tried to diversify, she then lists, counting on her left hand’s fingers, three athletes of color who have picked other schools. She seems unfazed by the intimation that there are only three capable women of color in the whole of U.S. high schools who would be able to compete on her team. To hammer home this point, she tells me that, “If I'm making up a team where women are diverse racially, but then not able to compete at this level, that wouldn't be really fair or in line with what we're getting tasked to do.”\footnote{Ibid.} Obviously, if women want something, then they just need to work harder for it (even if these women of color have been doubly excluded from these settings that would provide them the capacity to cultivate these skills).

I have to suppress the urge to disrupt our coded conversation to plainly express, with more than a slight smile, the fact that this excuse was often used as a reason to keep all women out of athletics. If we were to follow her reasoning, then her team would almost certainly not exist. Her sentiments are not far from the way men used to speak about women during the time of Pembroke, nor that different from the way white female athletes at that time tended not to stick up for their women of color counterparts. Her inability to acknowledge the structural issues that belie the lack of women of color athletes, and her seemingly apathetic dismissal are part of what allow these injustices around race to persist. Some things have not changed all that much.

While she claims that this is happenstance, one of her former athletes disclose to me that the homogeneity of recruits can be attributed to the fact that the male assistant coach has taken over this responsibility. And this would be fine if he did not appear to be overtly
misogynistic. So much so, as this athlete noted, that someone wishing him a “Happy National Women’s Day” prompted him to angrily ask why she would say that to him. A man who it appears cannot even celebrate the accomplishments of and acknowledge the obstacles that women face cannot be expected to be in the same spaces as them, least bit coach and mentor them. The drastic change from nearly a third of athletes on this team being women of color to a tenth, if lucky, reflects the double bind that women of color supposedly face under his scrutiny.

Furthermore, it appears that he does not support nor encourage the athletes he does recruit. The same athlete told me that once, while practicing with her, he threw the ball very aggressively at her, even though “you’re not supposed to be shooting hard in a warm up.” She ended up breaking her thumb by trying to catch it. When she expressed that she was hurt and something seemed seriously wrong, she told me that he ignored her concerns and even belittled her for complaining. She said he dismissed her, all the while chiding her for her supposedly weak behavior. A training staff member ended up driving her to the hospital, after she was ignored by her coach, because it was unsafe for her to drive with a broken thumb. He never apologized to her nor told her parents.

And when she returned from her injury, once a starter, she was now third string as a junior. A freshman played in her place. It was never overtly communicated to her why, but she had seen enough other star athletes who were injured and subsequently benched to infer what was going on. It was not long after that incident that she realized that the sport she had played since her childhood and pursued into college was no longer a space she wanted to be in.

39 “2017 Women’s Lacrosse Roster.”
40 “2020 Women’s Lacrosse Roster.”
41 Lacrosse Athlete. Personal Interview. 1 October 2019.
His attitude speaks to the notions of innate female fragility that female athletes contended with during the time of Pembroke, and still face in the present. A broken thumb in this instance was not seen as a legitimate injury coming from a woman, but rather a marker of her weak femininity. In a more pedestrian setting, one can further see this attitude in the ways in which he does not encourage his athletes, but rather castrates them for their errors. He attempts to harden them because he does not want to cater towards nor witness any signs of emotion, a tell-tale of femininity. Whereas women once existed in their own sphere with an entirely female coaching staff, they now exist in the world of men, like this coach, and must stamp out any weakness in order to meet these new standards.

The coaches, especially their male coach, underscore the need for physical strength for these women, too. This athlete tells me that, about a year ago, the coaches told each woman that they needed to put on ten pounds, muscle or otherwise. The head coach supposedly told them that they might not be able to wear “those little half-shirts that you guys all like.” With the first comment on muscle, I am nearly beside myself at the grossness of dictating a woman's weight and body composition. But when I hear the alleged commentary about what they can and cannot wear, I begin to question what decade we are in; of course, the women of Pembroke dealt with this in their presentation and male understandings of propriety, but that archaic mentality feels so removed from a school in which walking across the main campus reveals every fourth person in a crop top. The athlete has a smile creep in and a slight laugh when she talks about it; sometimes, humor is the only way you can process something so outlandish. She then discloses to me that
some of the heavier women in the room during this conversation gave the coaches a look as if daring them to call them out individually. The coaches never addressed this either.

The athletes on the team tried to get the administration to remedy the coaches’ behavior. This same athlete confided to me that she and a few of her teammates created a petition for the athletic director her junior year to have the two coaches removed. She tells me she went to a then senior on the team, another girl who had been benched after an injury, to ask if she thought it was a good idea and wanted to be involved. According to the athlete, “she herself had previously tried to get them fired.” The girl supposedly shrugged, disclaiming that she did not really care because it no longer affected her; but if they were passionate, they should go for it. This senior girl then went to the coaches to share their plan.

It seems, after all that these athletes endured, unfathomable that she would thwart efforts to remedy the coaching situation. But, the climate that the coaches facilitated made this action seem rather reasonable. They allegedly often encouraged girls to come to them with things brewing under the surface. The athlete even stated that “They [the coaches] used to make us fill out these anonymous surveys on the team, like is this person all bought in, do they complain ever.” The coaches rewarded those who fed into the culture with more playing time and openly favored them. Even though she was about to graduate and had experienced their biased treatment firsthand, the coaches allegedly ingrained this mentality so deeply within her that there was only one logical thing she could do with this information. Even the athlete I am speaking to, who told me about this controversy, the same one who helped draft and intended to deliver this petition to the athletic director, did not want me to use her name when talking to her former coach. They

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43 Ibid.
44 Ibid.
have a good relationship now after they talked about her plan to approach the athletic director. She does not want to risk any acrimony.

Like the time of Pembroke College, the theme of competition between teammates looms large. Whereas administrators and coaches previously pushed it out of female athletic spheres because women could not handle it, it now rears its ugly head in the form of coaches leveraging their power to pit girls against one another. The coach manufactured distrust directly harms these women who need exactly that to be successful on the field. But, when men gain and abuse their power over women in the form of coaching, this type of competition and strained relationships is what results. It seems telling to me that men are at the root of both the lack of competition in the days of Pembroke and the misdirected competition in the modern era; a true inversion of where those in power usually deem the problem to lie.

While I have certainly never played nor watched much of the sport, maybe 5 minutes at best in passing my high school field, I can still see the telltale signs and inherent inequities of women’s athletics in the sport and its functioning. The impression that one of the coaches does not even recognize the validity of gender inequity is in and of itself sexist. And his head female coach appears to wave away these issues by swallowing the discomfort and believing she can muscle her way through it and overcome by virtue of her and her athletes’ character.

But, men would never have to contend with attitudes like these and their effect on the sport and women should not have to either. It is highly unlikely, and borderline impossible, that a coach would ever break a male athlete’s thumb and then ignore him by virtue of his gender. Or that someone who is non-male would be in charge of judging male recruits and allegedly pick
people who look “attractive, skinny and blond;” 45 in this situation and in their actuality, recruitment would still slight male athletes of color. However, it is important to note that they do not have to deal with the intersectionality and the resulting biased treatment of being both female and a person of color. Or even that men would be told what to wear. While the coach can tell me all she wants that her goal is to “develop young women as leaders,” 46 the presence of this male coach has appeared to make it nearly impossible for her to be a true leader, least of all inspire and give her athletes the space to be leaders themselves.

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Chapter 4:

At the beginning of the Pembroke program, the lack of direct male influence on the day-to-day workings of athletics allowed women unparalleled autonomy. 47 Women formed meaningful interpersonal relationships through sports, unencumbered by male stigmas around social interactions. Many of these relationships were very intense and often romantic. The majority of female students did not accept homosexuality, especially prior to the ’60s and the sexual liberation movement, but because athletics were often ignored, women athletes were able

45 Ibid.
47 For the history of Pembroke College discussed in chapters 3 through 6, few sources offer a thorough overview of the history of Pembroke College athletics prior to its merger with Brown University athletics. For that reason, I rely primarily on a single source, Kaufman’s “The Search for Equity: Women at Brown University, 1891-1991,” for the vast majority of the information in these chapters relating to the history of Pembroke College athletics. When other sources are used, they are indicated in additional footnotes. More precise information regarding specific page numbers that relate to the specific historical events and conclusions were unavailable to me when I went to retrieve and confirm them at the end of the semester due to closures tied to covid-19.
to express themselves sexually and otherwise with minimal scrutiny. Men avoided and therefore did not dictate the norms and standards of behavior for female athletes.

Female athletic coaches, though, often counteracted this freedom by adopting standards and practices that defied student opinion and needs. From 1930-1961, Bessie Rudd ruled over Pembroke athletics with her throne as the Sayles gymnasium, the oddly shaped once gym now academic building called Smith-Buonanno Hall. She immersed herself in various female athletic policy-making organizations that stressed the importance of maintaining control in every aspect of women’s athletics, including gym classes. In order to sustain the prominence and power of athletics, she stressed the importance of a “sport for every girl and a girl in every sport.”

However, students opposed her focus on compulsory physical education. Many decried the ways in which they were favored above club teams and academics, often avoiding the perils of funding cuts. In 1938, the student newspaper, the Pembroke Record, published a poll showing that the majority of students favored only two years of compulsory gym. In order to underscore the injustice of this rule, they cited the fact that they had to follow men’s academic requirements, but were forced to complete four times as many athletic credits.

Rudd ignored their protests and the practice of freshmen and sophomores taking one hour of gym three times a week, juniors and seniors one hour of gym two times a week, mandatory lectures on hygiene and body mechanics (at least this time taught by women, even if these women did buy into and perpetuate sexist and inaccurate notions) and regular physical exams that again stressed posture persisted. While trying to increase their autonomy from men, female coaches inadvertently trampled on the freedoms and desires of the women they taught. Coaches focused on their desire for control, rather than centering the women they worked with. But the
fanaticism for sports that these coaches espoused did push the university to increase the available space and facilities for female athletics.

One instance of this is evident in the completion of Andrews Hall in 1947. Situated on the back of the Pembroke campus, where a co-ed dormitory, dining hall and study space provide refuge for tired, hungry and stressed students, formerly stood a two-toned, weathered and unassuming structure. This building, which again came about largely from the fundraising efforts of Pembroke students, housed the Metcalf Dining Hall. Students used this annex for classes in modern dance, body mechanics and fundamentals. The expansion of modern dance particularly enthused students. While the women used to shirk away from these classes because they felt the moves were silly, Flora Ricker transformed the program by eschewing large movements and pantomime. Students adored her classes and even formed a dance troupe under her guidance because of her attention to student preferences and needs. Again, she was partially able to do this because of the female sphere cultivated by male neglect. The push for greater athletic opportunity often sprang from coaches’ self-interest, but regardless of intent, their actions gave more opportunity for engagement in various athletic realms by increasing the available resources.

Another instance of increased opportunity can be seen by walking further east, towards the current gymnasium complex. A little before the gymnasium now known as the Nelson, sits a sprawling green area, punctuated by an unassuming brick building. In 1936, after Charles T. and Henry L. Aldrich left their home and property to the university, this area was transformed into the Pembroke Field. While the field was once populated by an ornate and austere mansion in its place now sits a walkway, with a few sweaty students ambling back home from the gym, and a
volleyball court, in which six students are clumsily practicing their serves. The additional area under the jurisdiction of Pembroke allowed the athletics program to further increase its offerings to include field hockey, fencing, golf, soccer, speedball, volleyball, archery, softball and lacrosse. These growing opportunities allowed all students, regardless of expertise, to find ways to engage with athletics.

However, despite the increasing presence of athletics, administrators still kept women from travelling long distances, participating in a greater volume of athletic competitions and developing a competitive culture. Varsity teams played no more than 5 intercollegiate games and these were usually confined to Radcliffe, Jackson and Wheaton, all colleges located relatively close by. The institution was more keen on facilitating play days, non-competitive athletic days where 3 or 4 universities would send representatives to participate in round-robin games. During these events, facilitators placed women on teams containing a representative from each of the universities in order to discourage competition and to facilitate cooperation and friendship. The university established these days, complete with a social after the athletics were over, in order to discourage the tumor-like growth of the masculine tendency for competition within athletic women.

While men conceptualized the framework for athletics, women dictated the execution of the program in ways that often allowed them greater autonomy. Pervasive sexist norms, at times internalized by female staff members, stymied this ability by placing limitations on athletic’s resources and opportunities. Additionally, the pervasive belief that women should not partake in competition limited fulfilling outlets for female athletes. However, the passion of athletes and
their more supportive coaching staff, like Ricker, allowed women to find community, reprieve and value in the athletic world.

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I walk into our scheduled location, the bookstore coffee shop, to meet a rugby player for our interview. I notice she is at a table with another girl, someone I recognize from the team roster. Both women greet me warmly, explaining that they had been studying together, and the unexpected guest introduces herself and confirms my recognition. She offers to stay for our conversation, which the other rugby player and I welcome. After hearing all about coach induced animosity between players on other teams, I am startled by not only the fact that they spend so much time together, but that they would want to talk about their perspectives on the team at the same time with me.

But, their coach is unlike most coaches I have heard about. Both women, with a butterinness to their voices indicating the effect she has on them, gush over her kindness and ability to connect with her athletes. Not only is she a former US national women’s player and in the Rugby Hall of Fame, but her players champion her for her ability to coach and care for her athletes, a feat somehow totally unreachable for so many other coaches on this campus. Her care and the culture such care creates are so apparent that one of the athletes even stated that “I fell in love with the team before I fell in love with the sport.” Coach Kathy, as her athletes affectionately call her, will personally reach out to them when they seem overwhelmed, or even just to get to know them. When another athlete I spoke to first joined the team, she reminisced

48 “Kathy Flores to Be Inducted Into U.S. Rugby Hall of Fame.”
49 Rugby Player 1. Personal Interview. 13 October 2019.
about how Kathy made an effort to stay after practice and get coffee with her to learn more about her as a person. She told me that “I think about this everyday, but we are so lucky to have her.”

Nearly all of the athletes I have spoken to have not only underscored Coach Kathy’s love for her athletes, but also the sport itself. In matching cadence, with a hint of humor, both athletes repeat her mantra that “Every body is a rugby body.” They smirk a little because they have heard it so often that it is nearly an inside joke. They also recognize how freeing that has been for them. Whereas many coaches tell athletes, and more generally women, that they need to have a certain body weight, and often encourage them to achieve this in unhealthy ways, Coach Kathy has never put that kind of pressure around weight in rugby.

Rather, Coach Kathy has requested that her athletes, regardless of body type, do their best to develop their skill set in the sport. As Coach Kathy believes, there is a role for everyone in the sport. All sorts of different bodies are needed to play well. Bigger bodies, often erroneously dismissed for being “unhealthy” in other sports are championed for their ability to guard the player with the ball and tackle the opposition. Smaller bodies, sometimes seen as too weak, are now fast and indispensable in running the ball for goals. In fact, one of the captains is a late in her college career walk-on, who does not even consider herself one of the better athletes on the team. Rather, she believes that Coach Cathy selected her for the role because of her dedication and passion.

This remarkable attitude, though, means that Coach Kathy works with athletes of varying skill sets. Her athlete’s lack of experience with the sport prior to Brown intensifies the disparity in skill. Both of the athletes, one of whom is now a captain, were walk-ons. They both joined

\[50\] Ibid.
because of an email from the coach encouraging them to try out for the team. The lack of experience and openness of the walk-on process means that the athletes who join and stay on the team are incredibly devoted. One of the women, who is a walk-on, says that “joining the team is the best thing I’ve done at Brown.” This intrinsic passion is not unlike the Pembroke students who found a community and passion in club sports.

However, Coach Kathy has to do far more work acquainting her athletes to the sport, often for the first time, and welcoming individuals who are not embraced on other teams because of rigid understandings of bodies. This facet of the team means she has to spend more time going through the technicalities and rules of the sport than a lot of other coaches. Coach Kathy loves the sport though, so she is more than willing to spend that time to ensure the team is accessible and competitive. According to one of her athletes, “She has to enjoy the process of building athletes and teaching... empowering strong, capable women.”

However, the extra work Coach Kathy does is a byproduct of deeply ingrained inequities. Rugby only became a varsity sport in the 2014-15 season. As such, there is little attention paid to the sport and few resources devoted to it. The sport currently receives only 4 recruiting spots. According to these athletes, Dartmouth and Harvard granted their women’s teams varsity status around the same time as Brown. They provided greater resources in the form of monetary backing and recruiting spots. Now these teams, that before the step-up to varsity held a losing record against Brown’s, are the top two in the country. So while the number of walk-ons

51 Rugby Player 2. Personal Interview. 13 October 2019.
52 Ibid.
53 April 14 and contact, “Women’s Rugby Is Brown’s 38th Varsity Sport.”
54 Rugby Player 1. Personal Interview. 13 October 2019.
55 “Big Green Ranked No. 1 in NIRA Rankings.”
indicates accessibility, it is also a detriment and necessity based upon the little university
resources and backing given to the athletes.

Coach Kathy also has to devote considerable time to each individual athlete because,
unlike many other teams of comparable size who have 2, 3 or sometimes even more assistant
coaches, she only has one. Men’s basketball is less than half the size of the team, yet employs
two assistant coaches and one assistant head coach. The one assistant coach on the rugby team
is also only allowed to be compensated for 20 hours of work each week. It is a full time job, but
with the part time status, many of these individuals have to seek side jobs, leaving Coach Kathy
to compensate.

The lack of attention paid to the team shows up in their media presence as well. A few
weekends ago, one of the women in the coffee shop exasperatedly concedes to me, the team was
the only one left off of the university snapchat story about upcoming games. When she reached
out to the account, another fatiguing action for a team that already has to fight for so much on
and off the field for attention, the social media staff member apologized to her. Another one of
the captains also told me she reached out to the account from her personal Instagram page and
never received a response. The social media account never posted about the fact that the team
won their overlooked game that day.

And when they’re not battling the lack of media attention, they’re battling male teams
that kick them off of reserved fields. The men’s lacrosse team has ousted the women’s team from
their field on a number of occasions. It is easy after all to push off a team that is both nascent and
all women. This action harkens to the ways in which Pembroke women did not have access to

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56 “2019-20 Men’s Basketball Roster.”
various training facilities, like the pool, because of the lack of competitiveness accredited to women’s teams and the ensuing supposed male superiority.

Worse yet, though, is the athletic training situation. Each year, according to the two senior rugby players with the most historical knowledge of the team, the rugby team receives one athletic trainer devoted to their athletes. Considering there are 36 women on the active roster, this seems to be another woefully under resourced aspect of the team. The egregiousness of the situation becomes more apparent with the fact that the trainer is always a fresh graduate of his or her program. The individual entasked with ensuring these athlete’s well-being does not have hands-on experience, and the moment they do, they leave the team to go on to pursue other opportunities.

This puts the women on the team in a dangerous position in regards to their physical health, as according to one of the captains “it's more of a safety issue than anything… for a full contact sport.”\footnote{Rugby Player 1. Personal Interview. 13 October 2019.} One of the athletes recently tore her ACL. She was devastated to stop playing the sport she loved her senior year. Intensifying her pain was the fact that it was not even properly addressed by the athletic trainer assigned to the team. The athlete turned to a senior trainer assigned to another team. She worked with the more knowledgeable trainer to start addressing the issue and asked that she speak to the younger woman and instruct her on ways to care for the injury. Without her willingness to ask for help and know where to seek it, she could have risked lifelong ACL deficiency and knee issues all because the university does not provide her team adequate physical care. Her friend tells me that in regards to physical injury in the full contact sport she has “started to just self-manage.”\footnote{Rugby Player 2. Personal Interview. 13 October 2019.}
Unsurprisingly, the men’s team does not contend with this issue. They utilize an outside training facility that has far more trainers, equipment and knowledge than the women’s team. However, they do not have to monitor their spending in the same way because they are a club team, rather than varsity. This distinction stems from the fact that, under Title IX regulations, there must be at least an equal number of women to men. Since the football team is so large, the university must maximize the number of women’s sports teams and minimize the number of men’s. Far from undercutting the resources of the men’s team, though, it appears that they actually benefit in this instance from this classification. They can utilize alumni money however they see fit.

The men’s team has ample financial backing. According to the athletes, one of the alums works at Bank of America and donates a lot of money to finance things like their trainer. Some of the money even goes to the men’s international winter training trip. While the men take in the rays of the Caribbean, the women’s team can barely afford to travel out of state, least bit out of country. The men even went on tour to the Czech Republic at one point and played the Czech national team. The women’s team alumnae do not have the funds to sustain such lavish amenities and opportunities. Women are dramatically underpaid compared to their male peers, and that financial disparity rears its ugly head in the opportunities afforded to the women’s team. But even if they did have the money to donate to the team, there are so many restrictions on varsity teams that would preclude them from accessing the same resources as the men’s team.

The Bank of America alum also donated considerable funds to the weight room. While the varsity status would supposedly gain the women’s team the upper hand of university facilities

59 “Brown Spending Spring Break in Prague, Zurich.”
that the men would be denied by virtue of being a club sport, this is not the case. Rather, because of the alum’s ties to the weight room, the men utilize this space as well. One of the few supposed benefits given to a women’s varsity team holds no bearing for the rugby players.

The requirement that these women receive varsity classification, as opposed to their male peers, seems to pose further hindrance to the rugby women who compete in such a male dominated sport. And while the captain and her friend concede that there are issues and limitations inherent in the team’s varsity classification, after where they started, the two athletes “are really glad that they are varsity”\textsuperscript{60} and would not want to go back to being a club sport. After all, they do not have the same alumni wealth and resources to draw upon.

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Chapter 5:

Taking an unexpected turn back towards the Main Campus, where the men learned, competed and played without the presence of women, exists one of the first punctures women made in this all-male bubble.\textsuperscript{61} On the Ruth Simmons Quad, near the blue bear art installation, exists the Ashamu dance studio. The space is adorned with large windows where one can peer in

\textsuperscript{60} Rugby Player 1. Personal Interview. 13 October 2019.

\textsuperscript{61} For the history of Pembroke College discussed in chapters 3 through 6, few sources offer a thorough overview of the history of Pembroke College athletics prior to its merger with Brown University athletics. For that reason, I rely primarily on a single source, Kaufman’s \textit{The Search for Equity: Women at Brown University, 1891-1991}, for the vast majority of the information in these chapters relating to the history of Pembroke College athletics. When other sources are used, they are indicated in additional footnotes. More precise information regarding specific page numbers that relate to the specific historical events and conclusions were unavailable to me when I went to retrieve and confirm them at the end of the semester due to closures tied to covid-19.
and see a mirrored room with a black dance floor and some seating for audience members.

However, from 1903 to 1979 this studio did not exist, but rather housed the Colgate Hoyt pool, affectionately referred to by the men as “Colgate’s bath tub.”

Men did not permit women to use this space, a common phenomenon for female college students at this time. The university, instead, expected women to utilize the Plantations Club pool to learn swimming, a requirement for graduating. The Plantations pool was segregated, preventing the few women of color from practicing for this exam and spending time with their peers. Women of color were doubly excluded from athletics because of their femininity and race. They could not even find true solidarity with their white female peers as they had even greater barriers to accessing athletics. It is also important to note that women of color faced severe adversity in gaining admission to the university, least bit athletics, because of deeply rooted sexism and racism that persists to the present.

The first time women entered this pool was after the success of two undergraduates in the Olympics, Albina Osipowich 1933 and Helen Johns 1936. Osipowich earned two gold medals for a world record breaking 100 meters and as a member of the 400 meter relay team in the 1928 Olympics and Johns medaled in the 400 meter relay in 1932. Osipowich chose to attend Pembroke for its proximity to her family and the ability to continue her swimming career, despite the clear imbalance in access to resources and opportunity for competition between men and women. At this time, it was normal for women to have so few resources, so she was just grateful for the opportunity.

62 “Encyclopedia Brunoniana | Colgate Hoyt Pool.”
The accolades of these women earned some women, including Osipowich, the right to perform exhibition swimming and diving prior to the men’s meet against Bowdoin. While it is important to note this development, it seems incredulous that a woman who quite literally set a world record was merely a warm-up to a men’s meet, of which none of these men had gone to the Olympics, least bit set world records. The male athletic sphere imposed and forced women to overcome immense hurdles. Even those who intensely honed their skills were never seen as peers to their idolized male athlete counterparts.

This new capacity did not set a precedent. It was not until the 1960s that women began to regularly use the men’s pool. Since women were only able to use the Plantations Club on a special partnership, they did not have consistent access to a facility for practice. These female swimmers eventually turned to the Colgate Hoyt pool as their answer. However, women were confined to incredibly late night practices as men’s varsity, club and intramural teams took precedence over even the highest level of women’s swim teams. Administrators placed men, no matter their skill level, above women.

There were recreational swim hours available, but male staff and students swam naked during this time, precluding women from utilizing the pool. When the women insisted that they should have access during this time and that men could simply wear bathing suits, men were outraged and refused to comply. Men’s comfort continuously took precedence over women’s needs. This practice is not unlike current conversations around women dressing more “modestly” in order to not distract men. The women refused to cower though. After men realized that the women intended to use the pool whether or not they were clothed, men began to wear swim trunks during recreation hours. Women eventually won the right to the pool, but it took immense
amounts of effort and protest to gain access to this resource, even after the appearance of female Olympians on the swim team.

Coeducational athletic spheres, a nominal sense of greater parity between men and women, picked up steam with World War II and its social ramifications. With decreased resources, like the rationing of gasoline and rubber, and the resulting loss of transportation, the university granted women greater access to athletic facilities. Men even began to take gym classes at Pembroke during a summer session in 1942 and therefore mixed further with female peers. This exchange made the policy of keeping women out of male athletic spheres blatantly hypocritical. Men could partake in the women’s athletic setting, but the University routinely denied women access to the better resourced men’s programs. The place of co-educational activities, albeit non-competitive, was cemented with the advent of the coeducational Outing Club and eventually the ensuing Yacht Club and Ski Club in the 1950s.

Furthermore, with the increase of the responsibilities of the Athletic Association by means of greater scope, came greater opportunities for co-educational programming. Pembroke’s athletic program grew in size as opportunities at both a club and competitive level continued to blossom during the 1950s. To reflect this change, the school renamed the department the Athletic Recreation Association (ARA) in 1959. With this greater scope and power, the ARA began to organize co-educational informal events like coed ice-skating parties.

Again, the theme of athletics promoting heterosexual interactions loomed as ice-skating was often a date-like environment. However, the University still prohibited men and women from competing against one another on the basis of the perceived masculine traits that women might acquire, like competitiveness, and women’s supposed inferiority. The closest women came
to competition against men were the club tournaments against other women’s teams that men organized and officiated. Even there though, the power dynamic that posited women as less than and under the domain of their male peers persisted.

Mixed athletic settings also reinforced sexist and heterosexist norms. While it is true that women never escaped these norms even when they had their own domain, men now had greater involvement and could more effectively enforce these standards. The 1950s Freshmen Handbook advised women to join the Yacht and Ski clubs under the guise that there was an “... advantageous ratio of Brown men to Pembrokers” and that athletics were an effective means of staying slim and therefore being attractive to men.

Additionally, the Physical Education Department’s of both Pembroke and Brown openly lauded athletics’s ability to facilitate satisfying romantic relationships. The required fundamentals freshmen class had a physical education rubric that reinforced desirable traits for femininity and heterosexual romance. This rubric included inane tasks like “how to walk in heels... and how to introduce your date to your grandmother.” It was particularly important for the school to stress heterosexuality to ward off the fear that athletics and brawniness would facilitate lesbiansim. Obviously this program entirely stamped out homosexuality, both for students and the single female coaches who served as their role models. With deeply entrenched norms, it became almost inevitable that the emergence of men in women’s spaces would increase the presence of these gendered expectations.

Temporal circumstances and women’s tenacity for increased equity, like with the pool, resulted in greater overlap between men’s and women’s athletics. While women nominally received greater access to resources with this change, the inclusion of men in the day-to-day
activities of female athletes decreased the seriousness of their program as the space became a means of heterosexual courtship. Women interacted more consistently with men and therefore contended with even greater devaluation of their athletic program and autonomy.

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I am moving my hands to keep busy: checking my phone for a last minute cancellation message, moving the mouse on my computer so the screen does not go dark, in case he appears and I have to immediately start the interview, and periodically rubbing my hands over the plush chair I am sitting on in the coffee shop, while scanning the room for a more optimal seating location. He is three minutes late. But he would not offer on two occasions to speak about his sport, swimming, with me if he did not mean it. It is just that speaking about gender inequity in athletics with a guy on a team seems like a hazardous and potentially inflammatory situation.

When he does arrive, he plops down in the plush chair next to mine. I fumble with the new phone to begin the recording. I am acutely aware of his perception of me. When I acknowledge my lack of iPhone knowledge, to dissipate some of my internal dialogue, he cracks a smile and in a tone of disbelief asks if I have never had one. I breathe a sigh of relief. He certainly would not be so amiable if he was on guard and ready to rip my project apart as unfounded in targeting both athletics and men.

But my feelings of self-consciousness are not unusual for women who engage with and scrutinize a historically male realm. Ask any female athlete. Men have long posited women in athletics as inferior, creating an acute self-awareness for female athletes regardless of talent. Swimming has a long history of this practice as seen by the Olympic swimmers who performed
exhibition swimming for a trivial men’s meet. And while things have certainly changed for female swimmers in the present, the effects linger.

One really tangible way that this has manifested stems from the previous practice of the joint men and women’s swim team. Up until about four years ago, there existed one coach for men and women. But, men and women require different workout routines to excel at swimming; men have an easier time gaining muscle, and find weightlifting a beneficial practice, whereas women tend to find more success with getting laps in because they do not gain muscle as readily. Women made up the bulk of the team at this time to ensure that the university was providing adequate opportunity and complying with Title IX. However, the team workouts centered on weightlifting. As a result, the men posted greater improvements in times than their female peers.

Additionally, the former joint team structure required both men and women to have leadership roles. The whole team would vote on the male and female leaders. Despite the nominally equitable leadership representation, there was always a male perspective and judgement on women’s credibility, including in the selection process. This system, a stab at equality that ignored long standing gendered norms, created a space in which women both underperformed and faced male scrutiny.

According to the male swimmer, since their split, the women’s coach has kept their practices and social spheres relatively separate. He tells me this while sitting facing forward in his chair, body turned away from me, hands in motion. He finally makes eye contact with me to explain her reasoning. Again, I have to remind myself that his decision not to wholly face me and make eye contact is not a matter of lack of engagement or underlying judgement. He

63 Stratman, “Differences In Training Programs And Time Trial Performances Of Teenage Sprint Freestyle Swimmers.”
cautiously explains that she “thinks that when men and women’s teams are too close, women leaders don’t emerge and they don’t have their own team identity.”\textsuperscript{64} He says he does not want to negatively characterize her with this statement.

But to me, this decision does not tar her character but rather indicates a deft understanding of underlying gender social dynamics and their history. She, unlike their previous coach of the joint squad, recognizes the importance of giving women their own space to craft as they see fit. If I cannot even have a conversation without having to constantly remind myself that I am not being scrutinized by this man who has made every effort to honestly and kindly answer my questions, then I cannot imagine what it must have been like to perform in front of men daily. Her decision has given women on the swim team a nearly unparalleled sense of autonomy; in some ways, it appears to be almost the antithesis of the Brown University and Pembroke merger.

However, despite the efforts of the coach, women on the team still grapple with body image and presentation. Society teaches women to scrutinize what they look like, starting from a young age when the media bombards them with images of princesses and other women known almost exclusively for their physicality. And when you are an athlete and taught that your body is meant to perform in particular ways, and look certain ways while doing it, the message is inevitably going to sink in. It is nearly unavoidable when you also add the fact that swimmers perform in a one piece swimsuit, an incredibly unflattering and revealing article of clothing.

Another athlete I spoke to, a female diver, echoed the problems around swimming and body commentary. She informs me that she is fairly body confident as she reclines comfortably on the seat in front of me. She states that “I didn’t even realize until college that the vast majority

\textsuperscript{64} Swimming Athlete. Personal Interview. 12 October 2019.
of girls, and even guys, have body issues." But even still, one coach she loved dearly and had almost no issues with once made a comment about her body that stuck with her.

As a diver, her body is supposed to contort in very precise ways to execute a dive and is adjudicated based on her ability to meet these rigid standards. Her coach once told her that a certain swimsuit was cut in a way that made her back look less straight in her dive, grounds for losing points. She did not understand where this comment came from, and vocalized her confusion. She felt deeply uncomfortable. Regardless of her performance, her swimsuit played no role in her ability to execute the dive, nor the actual straightness of her back. It did not make sense that a coach should make her dress a point of conversation, rather than say how straight her arms actually were in her execution.

Even when coaches refrain from body conversations, norms around the sport and self-directed comments by athletes fuel this dialogue. The female diver sits upright as she gestures towards her shoulders and explains that swimmers are known for being broad shouldered. She is not a swimmer, but yet, she tells me that when she mentions she is on the team here, people will look at her shoulders and tell her that she has the body for it. She practically snorts at how ridiculous this comment is. She acknowledges, though, that many of the women take comments like this seriously. The women may not verbally acknowledge it, but they largely refrain from wearing off the shoulder tops. These swimmers do not want to draw further attention to something already scrutinized by others and deemed aberrant for the “ideal” femme body.

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But there are instances where female swimmers and divers directly acknowledge these norms. She notes that "everyone is constantly thinking about their bodies. sometimes it's even their parents saying they need to eat less."\(^66\) The diver fights back tears as she talks about how women in the locker room will talk about parts of their bodies that they do not like. Insidious comments about their butts looking big that they carelessly lacerate themselves with. And worse, yet, “people feed off of each other.”\(^67\) The diver begins to visibly sob, tears streaking her pained face, as she recounts listening to these women she dearly loves talk so plainly about hating themselves. As she admits, seeing themselves in these unflattering and revealing swimsuits puts insecurities on full display. “You're basically naked in front of your peers and coaches.”\(^68\) It is hard to escape body issues regardless of what you are wearing, but the unique facets of the one piece and the form of judgement inherent in diving do not help.

They also contend with the gendered attitudes that the administration perpetuates. In the fall of 2017, the university discovered that the men’s swim team had an annual ritual that involved alcohol and a skit. The university charged the men’s team with hazing their first years. They claimed that not only did the upperclassmen pressure first years to drink, but that the skits involved racist and sexist overtones.\(^69\) During this discussion, the male athlete glances over from his forward facing position to relate that comments about race were made by individuals from these racial identities to close friends of the same background.

While he concedes to me, still facing me, but now with his eyes downcast, that these activities may have been uncomfortable for some of the athletes, although “that was never the

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\(^{66}\) Ibid.
\(^{67}\) Ibid.
\(^{68}\) Ibid.
\(^{69}\) For the University statement on the team’s actions and resulting punishment, please refer to https://www.brown.edu/news/2018-03-09/swim-statement
goal and most people walked away with positive experiences,” he still takes issue with the way the administration handled the situation. According to him, Jack Hayes, the athletic director, verbally chastised the first years, the supposed “victims,” separately from the rest of the team. About a year ago, one of the “victims” of the incident explained to me that he enjoyed the skit and saw it as a bonding activity. He was irate at the university response. He was devastated by the prohibition of team practices, roughly four days before their biggest meet of the year. He even considered transferring.

The University did not allow the team to begin practicing again until a year from the incident, and competitions were only allowed a year and a half out. According to the swimmer, the University president abridged some of the initial punishment as she believed the repercussions to be too severe. The swimmer I am speaking to, with a slightly softer voice and some pauses as he thinks about how to phrase the thought, conveys to me that he believes that the harsh punishment was a result of “being connected to toxic masculinity. Hazing is seen as a manhood rite.”

And while these men have certainly been subject to attitudes around their gender, the women’s team appears to not be exempt from gender based bias. The women’s team also had certain practices around new members. For the privacy of the team, I will not describe these practices, but will say that they involved drinking. During the investigation of the men’s team, the university punished the women’s team for facilitating underage drinking. The University only placed the women’s team on probation as a result, which meant that they could practice but

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70 Swimming Athlete. Personal Interview. 12 October 2019.
71 Ibid.
not compete. It appears that the University drastically under scrutinized them in comparison to their male counterparts, suggesting a benefit of being a women’s team.

However, he tells me, in an even keeled tone suggesting the commonality of such a practice, he believes that the women were overlooked because the university did not believe them capable of anything more severe. It appears that underlying their benefit is the pernicious belief that women are too docile and innocent to commit any wrongs. This persistent attitude is the same one that kept competition out of Pembroke athletics, and “necessitated” a male presence and superiority in the form of men taking leadership positions and judging women’s competitions. It certainly played a hand in the prevalence of interteam dating as these attitudes delegitimized female athletes by perpetuating the idea that coed teams were really a form of women garnering male attention. The modern day swim team is a breeding ground for heterosexual romance, colloquially known as “swimcest.”\(^{72}\)

While the University doled out far more lenient treatment for the women’s team, it appears to be undergirded by the patronizing attitudes that persist from the days of Pembroke athletics.

As a last thought, though, he assures me that he and other upperclassmen make genuine attempts at stymying sexist commentary. He states, with an earnestness in his eyes and a steady, assured tone, that “as a captain, I try to stress that if you’re confident in yourself and sexuality there is no need to brag about hooking up with or objectifying people.”\(^{73}\) I thank him for his time, nearly an hour and a half of his Saturday. And this time, fully turned in my direction and making sustained eye contact with me, he states that he enjoyed talking about his team and sport. I feel the layers of anxiety melt off of me, buoyed by the fact that he has not been brimming with

\(^{72}\) Ibid.
\(^{73}\) Ibid.
concealed ire during the whole interview. Again, I wonder what it must be like to be a woman in this environment every day, competing and inherently scrutinized by the male coach, staff and swimmers. I feel grateful that I do not have to do that and now the women’s swim team have some degree of separation from it, too. Although, they can never truly escape the male gaze and influence because it is built into the athletic program and society as a whole.

**Chapter 6:**

The imposition of men during the athletic mergers starting in the 1950s resulted in some improvements to the program, but largely left female athletes and coaches floundering to retain respect and control. Rudd’s guiding principle that women should be in charge of female athletics played a crucial role and point of tension in the ongoing convergence of men’s and women’s athletics. The two Yacht Clubs merged in 1953. Prior to this period though, women made up the leadership of their club and had full jurisdiction. The men initially wanted the joint leadership to not include any women, but rather allow two Pembroke women who were not on the board to show up to board meetings and relay back what they learned to their female peers.

Rudd, impassioned by the belief that women should be in power of their athletics, counseled them on how to rebuttal. While they did not take her advice to demand that at least...
two women were on the board every year, they did manage to require that women could be elected by the same processes of men. One might call this set up equitable, but with continual reinforcement of women’s inherent inferiority, women stood nearly no chance of gaining any authority. The organization could elect women to the board, but that did not mean women were on the board. While women once ruled over their own separate sphere, the merger now forced them to concede much of their power to men who viewed them as their inferiors. Rudd and her philosophy stood as one of the few stalwarts against this male encroachment.

One of the most apparent indicators of the decreasing influence of women in Pembroke’s athletic program came around the tenure, and eventual demotion, of Arlene Gorton. Gorton, class of 1952, was a former disciple of Rudd during her athletic career at Pembroke. She took up the helm of the program in 1961 against the backdrop of the civil rights, anti-war, anti-poverty, sexual revolution and feminist campaigns. As a result, many students came to resent the athletic program due to its place in the perceived “establishment.” Pembroke students rallied against the requirement for four years of athletic programs. They contended that the disparity between the four years required for women and the one year for men was unjust and akin to sexist practices like curfews and sign-outs for women. These female students triumphed over the perceived archaic requirement in 1963. While these women were correct in their assertion that the stringency of their program compared to the men’s was grounded in sexism, especially recalling that the university implemented it to counteract women’s feminine fragility, they neglected to recognize the influence that this would have on the autonomy and presence of women’s athletics.

Women had a much smaller separate athletic sphere after the merger and this downsizing resulted in greater competition with the men for resources, usually resulting in the women losing
out. Men took precedence in practice spaces and for equipment, so women often had drastically shorter schedules and makeshift gear. Most of the money that women’s teams had came from fundraising. For example, the women’s ice hockey team, known as the Pembroke Pandas, sold “Panda Power” buttons and chocolate bars in order to play teams in Canada.

Furthermore, women often did not receive any athletic attention in campus publications. The Pembroke Record used to serve as an important media outlet, but as women’s athletics, and more broadly, the distinctly female sphere shrunk, the Brown Daily Herald took on greater prominence for Pembroke women. Many women’s teams, despite their successes, hardly saw their names in print. Two members of the Pandas lambasted this fact with a facetious letter to the editor of the Brown Daily Herald expressing that appearing in print in the newspaper “brings to our collective guts a jelly-like sensation that not even a good slapshot can equal and only a Sharpe Refectory cranberry can understand.” Media and resources were far undercut for women’s athletics with the paring down of exclusively female teams.

The increasing presence of co-educational opportunities and the sexual liberation movement also resulted in the shift from athletics as a means to heterosexual relationships to the overt sexualization of women. Men subjected women to increased rates of sexual harassment because of shared facilities and increased proximity. Men’s belief that women were sex objects always existed. However, the previously required single-education facilities allowed women to avoid direct and fatiguing contact with the men and their sexist norms.

Men on teams, particularly the swim team, were known to pinch women’s butts and to make open comments about women’s bodies more generally. When women on the Dance Club attended an invitational at Yale in 1968, the Yale Daily News reported that the male crowd
presumed they would be subject to a “sexual extravaganza.” The same article went on to detail the buxomness of the Vassar team. The sexual liberation movement often signaled greater opportunity for women and ownership of one’s sexuality, but Pembroke women faced greater opportunity for sexual harassment with the encroachment of men upon their athletic space.

One of the few holdouts remained club sports, where female athletes could avoid the presence of men. In 1961, the Pembroke Sailing Organization competed in regattas with other New England colleges through the Women’s Intercollegiate Sailing Association. Even this liberty only really came about because the coed men’s club sailing regattas often barred women from participation. Herein existed a strange paradox: the more women were denied access to opportunities, the more autonomy and ability women possessed in crafting and participating in athletics. Along this note, club teams for women in skiing, racing other teams in the Women’s Intercollegiate Ski conference, basketball, synchronized swimming and others provided the women an all-female space to compete in intercollegiate competition largely unrestricted by men, unlike their coeducational counterparts. Women and their coaches exercised greater influence and power in club teams, rather than the university sponsored coeducational teams.

The eventual merger of Brown University and Pembroke College and the promulgation of Title IX emerged as an important force in women’s athletics shortly after the dominance of club sports. The two officially became one in 1971, although they often shared important overlaps and were not wholly separate prior to this, as displayed by the coed teams. In 1972, Title IX was officially put into law; however, the legal delineation of what equality looked like did not materialize until two years later. These major policy changes would go on to exert an
important influence on women’s athletics that proved to hold both negative and positive influence on women’s autonomy.

While Title IX emerged as a response to the feminist movement and calls for greater female equality, it often eroded women undergraduate’s and staff’s rights, especially in athletics. Located on Ruth Simmons Quad, near the blue bear lamp installation, stands Lyman Gymnasium. It was the building that served as the athletic facility for men and women after the programs were unified. One of the most stark displays of female disempowerment at the hands of the merger was the nearly total loss of power that female coaches and administrators incurred. The university restructured the athletic administration in order to adequately oversee the men’s and women’s teams. Gorton, who at this point had served nearly 11 years as the strong and trusted head of the women’s athletic program, was demoted in favor of her male counterpart, Ferdinand A. “Andy” Geiger. Gorton would eventually be named assistant director of athletics, but would never recapture her rightful position of head of athletics. Despite her long career, commitment to her students and advocacy for women, she could never overcome the power of institutionalized sexism.

Arlene Gorton also faced intense sexism during the debates to leave the Association of Intercollegiate Athletics for Women (AIAW) for the NCAA. Female coaches and physical educators founded the AIAW in order to prevent exploitative practices that they saw as characteristic of men’s sports, like high-pressure recruiting, disregard for academics and the commercialization of athletics. As women’s athletics became more profitable, thanks to Title IX increasing the volume of funding and opportunity, the NCAA attempted to convince women’s

75 “Geiger Named to Post at Brown.”
teams to cross-over to their program. They offered greater funding for travel compared to the AIAW and became an enticing option.

Gorton, one of the founding members of the AIAW at Brown, vocalized her disdain for switching over. When women’s athletics did eventually make the move to the NCAA, she was not only denied a role as a representative, but also told by the university president, Swearer, that she could not attend the meetings for two years. University presidents do not often penalize dissent so severely, especially from long-standing, devoted faculty, but as a woman in a precarious and inherently unequal setting, it was easy to push Gorton aside. Her devotion to women’s needs and rights through the AIAW, even if misguided at times, caused her further losses of power in the joint, read: male, athletic world.

Of course, with the merger and the nascent state of Title IX, women’s athletics did not fare much better than Gorton did. Title IX did encourage the university to increase the number of varsity sports to 13 by 1980. These included new programs for cross country, track and field, soccer, lacrosse and softball. This change pushed the prevalence and support of club sports, including skiing, indoor track, sailing, rugby and equestrian, further towards the backburner. Students at the time were incredibly devastated by this cultural change as club sports were a cornerstone in their athletic community and they were now being forced to conform and mold into the male athletic sphere. When men’s and women’s cultures are at head, the “inferior” one is almost always subsumed.

Furthermore, Title IX’s existence and supposed implementation did not fix all existing gender-based problems for varsity athletics. The University paid male coaches astronomically more than their female peer coaches, despite the amount of work these women had to put in to
even be hired or to advocate for their athletes. Women’s fields were dismal, especially when compared to the men’s, and if they shared facilities, men always received better practice and playing times. The Sports Information Office hardly gave women any media coverage, showing blatant preference towards men’s athletics; student publications already iced out women, but even the university did not grant them any attention or time. Women’s sports teams lacked full-time trainers, which not only intimated their inferiority, but led to greater incidences of physical harm.

Even attempts at carving out spaces for women and their grievances resulted in hostility. The women’s team coaches used to meet separately from general coaching meetings to talk about these issues and others that plagued women in the athletic world. Instead of encouraging spaces of community and solidarity for women to explore and air these issues, the athletic director requested that the women stop these meetings in 1978. He alleged that these meetings were “inappropriate,” although sexual discrimination was clearly appropriate because that was not asked to be stopped. While merging athletic spheres seemed like a means of facilitating equality, it often served as a tool to dissipate female bonds and community. This method quelled discontent and ensured that these issues did not have to be acknowledged nor addressed.

There are, however, some important respects in which Title IX bolstered female athletics. Since the university now had to, at least nominally, provide women equal opportunity to athletic opportunities, women gained greater access to athletic facilities and coaching. The government mandated that women had the same number of athletic teams, which resulted in women having 15 varsity sports, the same number as their male peers, in 1988. Furthermore, women, unlike the days of the Colgate Hoyt pool, could actually access athletic facilities for practice because of the
mandate of Title IX. Whereas outside peewee hockey teams used to relegate the women’s hockey team to 11 PM practices in Meehan’s hockey ring, the University now believed adult, trained women to be surprisingly more important than 7 year old boys. Women’s opportunities grew nominally during the merger because of legal requirements on quantitative aspects of athletics, like the number of teams and time access to athletic facilities.

The official merger of the university and the implementation of Title IX created greater economic parity for women overall. However, the detriment it posed to female coaches created intense power struggles that typically resulted in these women losing their long-earned respect and positions. As a result, athletics became a space of hotly contested power that often harmed the autonomy of female athletes. As well, Title IX resolved issues around funding, but did not address the qualitative discrepancies, like playing space, media presence and the discrediting attitudes around women’s athletics. The merger created greater nominal equity but in reality undercut the ability of women coaches and athletes to craft and partake in athletics.

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I am sweaty post-workout and trying to figure out why my heart rate feels so high as I walk to the Nelson lobby-- is it the workout’s effects or the prospect of talking with this current rugby, former basketball and track athlete who the swimmer put me in touch with? I have never met her before, and while she is willing to talk to me, I wonder to what depth she will share. We arrive at the table at roughly the same time. I begin the audio and launch into my first question, but before I can finish, she interrupts me. I feel a slight flashback of talking to the coach, but
instead of a coded question, she asks if I would like to move so the audio is better. Rather than being reticent to share, she wants to ensure that the audio captures everything that she has to say.

As she explains to me, a frustration simmering in her eyes, she has attempted to talk about her grievances against the basketball team with administrators for so long and has largely been ignored. She explains that the reason this persists is because "there are a lot of closed door meetings, so it’s hard to corroborate and you can’t really do anything about it [the coach’s treatment]." This athlete believes that the high rate of individuals who have quit the team can be attributed to the toxic environment the head coach has facilitated. The three-sport athlete states that “a big part of why I left the basketball team is because they were looking at me like I was crazy.” The athlete also alleged that the university has not taken action because the coach has a personal relationship with the athletic director, in which they golf together, and that she may retaliate against anyone who publicly speaks out against her. The university even recently suppressed an article in the student newspaper about the team situation.

As corroborated by multiple former basketball players I spoke to, the head coach forces athletes to come to her with their problems. She then leverages this personal information against them. In one instance, she allegedly spoke to an individual with a history of self-harm and “asked her to roll up her sleeve in her office so she could hold up her arm and look at her self-harm scars.”

The three-sport athlete is no stranger to this as she tells me, her voice picking up pace and her tone growing more and more charged, how she was assaulted her first semester on campus.

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76 Three-Sport Athlete. Personal Interview. 14 October 2019.
77 Ibid.
78 Ibid. Also, corroborated by other former basketball players and Brown Daily Herald members.
79 Ibid.
One of the juniors on the team was formerly romantically involved with her assailant. The teammate was irate with her. She told me that instead of being met with compassion, she was iced out socially by this junior, one of the oldest and most influential girls on the team. The teammate would purposely ignore her, encouraging the other girls to do so as well, and leaving the athlete nearly devoid of support. She went to her coach to talk about her assault, not even mentioning the other player and the team dynamic. She tells me she was met with little compassion. In fact, she recounts that the coach “immediately asked me if I had been drinking. Like the first words out of her mouth.” According to her, months later, the coach voiced approval that the interpersonal tension was resolved, revealing that she knew all along and did nothing to assist the athlete.

To make her feelings of isolation and despondency worse, she spent less and less time on the court. She stated that “I went from playing over half the game one weekend to playing just seven seconds the next.” Supposedly, when she asked her coach why, looking for feedback and to improve, she was met with a callous and even contemptuous reply. She alleges that she was told “We won right? Then do not question my decision.” And so she did not, and tried to ignore the ways in which the coach and basketball as a whole increased her stress and discomfort around her assault.

She turned her focus towards the Title IX case and hearing against her assailant. She scheduled it for the earliest available date, sometime around the end of the first semester, in order to expedite the process and receive some resolution. In the interim, she moved dorms so she did not have to run into him. She did not tell her team about this.

80 Ibid.
81 Ibid.
82 Ibid.
The athlete states that one of the assistant coaches contacted her before the hearing to ask that she move the date and time. They had practice then, and this assistant coach supposedly believed that her schedule was more important than her Title IX case. The three-sport athlete raises her eyebrows a little and speaks with an exasperated and slightly bemused tone. Even now the situation is so farcical that she cannot help but find humor in how outlandish and inappropriate it was. Her mom, her main support system, called the head coach to speak about this behavior. To further her disbelief, she found out that not only was her daughter told this, but that the head coach allegedly gave this directive.

Her mom became upset and revealed the ways in which her daughter felt alienated from the team. Again, I am told that her coach had no compassion. She supposedly told her mother that the athlete was very happy and that she was not to be believed because she had mental health issues. The coach appeared to be smug at catching her mother off-guard. According to the athlete’s account, the coach then stated that she had been hearing voices and was schizophrenic. This statement was patently untrue, merely the exaggeration of the fact that the athlete had walked home late one night and was worried about her physical safety. The athlete believes that she said this to “undermine me and my mom.” But supposedly the coach used private information, that came from assistant coaches, to gain an upper hand in conversations with other athletes and their families as well. It appeared that the head coach enjoyed the ability to wield her influence and exert control.

And this understanding held true for another athlete on the team. I actually met the second athlete prior to coming to Brown at an accepted students day. I remember her being very

83 Ibid.
tall. I also remember this prompting the revelation that yes, she was on the basketball team, and enthused about getting to play at Brown. But when I first started looking into athletic rosters, I was dumbfounded to find that she was not on the team. I assumed she must have been injured and unable to play. There was no other way that the girl who beamed at me when talking about her future basketball career would not be on the roster.

But when she texted me to say that she would love to chat with me about her experience, after hearing about me from her former teammate, I knew something far deeper was at play. We sat in the lobby of the sciences library, a place that was so public that there could be no hesitancy nor reserve in her desire to talk. She explained to me in a quiet, but serious and even toned voice that she believes her coach leveraged her position in order to exert control on her. She ended up quitting the team because she could not tolerate the toxic environment that was taking its toll on both her physical and mental health. She alleges that she failed several courses due to the abusive and draining team environment.

Early on in her playing career, the coach benched her. She says that one day her coach sat her down in her office and explained to the player that she was not quick enough on the court, which was more of an explanation than the first athlete I spoke to was given. The coach supposedly went on to say that if she lost 8 pounds, she would be faster and therefore more competitive. This coach had never spoken to her about her weight prior to this meeting and any access she may have had to this information would have come from a physical. She was particularly baffled as “she was asking me to lose a very obscure number because 8 pounds is very strange.”

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84 Basketball Player. Personal Interview. 17 October 2019.
The basketball player alleges that the coach gave her dieting tips that had supposedly worked for her. The coach allegedly instructed the athlete to abide by them in order to get more playing time. The university has nutritionists, but the coach never mentioned this resource. Instead, the coach supposedly co-opted the opportunity to exert singlehanded and uninformed control. Regardless of the athlete’s feelings towards her body, she desperately wanted to play and would do almost anything to get back on the court.

The athlete tells me, upon reflection, that the recommended diet was incredibly unhealthy for her body and her intensive practice schedule. “I didn’t look right. I wasn’t losing weight right.”\textsuperscript{85} With the same steady voice, she evenly expresses that there were some days that she had consumed so few calories that she worried she would pass out on the court. The three-sport athlete on the basketball team worried about the player and could see the change in her body and energy every day at practice. She looked undernourished and emaciated.

Sitting in front of me, looking buoyant and healthy, she attributes the turn around to her family visiting. When her mom saw how worn down she looked, she asked about her diet. Upon finding out about the athlete’s calorie cutback, she told her daughter that she had to start eating normally again, regardless of what the coach was supposedly telling her. The athlete wholeheartedly believes that “If my parents hadn't seen me and said something I probably would have gone down that route. Mentally, I was already compromised so I definitely could have seen myself getting an eating disorder.”\textsuperscript{86}

Unfortunately though, the basketball player claims that these comments were not the only one’s she received about her appearance. As one of the few students of color on the team during

\textsuperscript{85} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{86} Ibid.
her first year, the coach supposedly lofted racially coded comments against her and the three other teammates of color. These alleged comments were unnoticed or worse yet, ignored. She recounts to me with her unwavering tone that holds a glimmer of pain and anger, that white girls would wear their hair in singular, chunky braids during games. She and the other teammates of color would opt for buns because single braids are ill-suited for their hair type. The coach allegedly urged the team to wear a braid during games because it looked “neater,”\textsuperscript{87} a statement that appears to be a thin veneer hinting at her beliefs about women of color and their hair. The player stated that “it did feel targeted because there were only a few people not braiding their hair and the majority of us were people of color.”\textsuperscript{88}

The basketball player claims that sometimes this attitude was even more transparent. Prior to the games, the team would go through the opposing team’s rosters to strategize. According to the player, on several occasions the coach would make comments about an athlete’s physical appearance. One of the center’s black friends on an opposing team wears her hair in an afro. The head coach supposedly made a comment about her having “wild hair,”\textsuperscript{89} with a derisive and mocking tone. While commenting on another woman’s appearance is entirely unmerited in an athletic competition, openly mocking a person of color’s hair is entirely uncalled for, unprofessional and overtly racist.

The coach’s alleged racial prejudices appeared more blatant during a game that involved kneeling. Prior to the game, several black players on the opposing team posted to their Instagram stories that they intended to kneel in support of Kaepernick and in opposition to the racism inherent in the United States. The head coach was supposedly enraged. According to the player,

\textsuperscript{87} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{88} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{89} Ibid.
during the pre-game huddle, she openly castigated the kneeling women as disrespectful of Brown’s court and expressed sentiments along the lines of "how dare they do that on our court... you don't do that kind of thing."  

Allegedly, the only black coaching staff member later approached the women of color on the team. They all vocalized their discomfort with the coach’s comments. The assistant coach spoke to the head coach and the head coach supposedly deafeningly replied that “I need to know that you’re on my side.” The coach eschewed the controversy and leveraged her position of power. There is no reason to incite hostility towards players on the basis of their beliefs. It appears that the coach may have overstepped her boundaries in order to criticize the political actions of opposing players. Her supposed actions indicate no sensitivity towards the racial injustices these athletes protested.

But, the athletes I spoke to claim that this behavior was common and almost never questioned because of the power dynamics she constructed. The three-sport athlete told me that the head coach once told a training staff member that she was not allowed to emotionally be there for the members of the team. The head coach supposedly wanted the girls to come to her and "made a concerted effort to get people to disclose personal information to her.”

One example of her alleged control can be seen in the team call-out meeting. When the basketball player grew disgruntled with her lack of playing time, long after giving up on the ill-advised and unsolicited dieting tips, she griped about it with a few of her teammates. The coaches played some of these athletes regularly. The basketball player alleged that when the coach heard about these murmurs of discontentment from one of the starters, she made the entire

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91 Basketball Player. Personal Interview. 17 October 2019.
The athlete emphasizes to me in her same controlled voice that she does not blame these girls. She has no ill-will, because she does not believe “it’s the girls’ nature. It goes back to the fact that she creates a toxic culture.”\textsuperscript{93} As a result each girl strove to remain in the coach’s good graces. Of course they were going to say something.

At the meeting, she states that the coach asked one of the athletes for the names of those who had grumbled about the team. When she listed the individuals, the head coach supposedly asked in front of all of the team members and coaches if any of those players wanted to quit then and there. One girl, who had scheduled a meeting for later that day with the coach, raised her hand and left the team. The coach allegedly responded by telling the athlete who quit “to get the hell out and never spoke to her again.”\textsuperscript{94} Not only does it appear that the coach solicited insider information from her athletes in return for favorable treatment, but that she also supposedly used that information to publicly shame teammates who held any grievances with the environment she cultivated. The athletes I spoke to claim that the coach exerted airtight control over them and their personal lives.

According to athletes on the team, the head coach exerted a toxic control and abused the inherent power dynamic between coach and athletes. She supposedly had no respect for their boundaries because she sought to dictate their behavior and have sole authority over them. One of the athletes even expressed that “I 100% do not believe that she should be a coach. I think she has a negative impact on players’ mental and physical well-being.”\textsuperscript{95} Athletes on the team claim that their coach never listened to them and that they have been practically ignored by the university. Any and all administrators they have spoken to have supposedly shrugged off their

\textsuperscript{93} Basketball Player. Personal Interview. 17 October 2019.
\textsuperscript{94} Three-Sport Athlete. Personal Interview. 14 October 2019.
\textsuperscript{95} Ibid.
grievances as unverifiable. This claim strikes me as comparable to the way we sweep under the rug and delegitimize romantic abusive and violent relationships. As a woman, even when another woman perpetuates abuse, we are never believed whether it be on the court or the finding of no guilt in the sexual assault case of the three-sport player.

Both of these athletes have quit, drained of the love for the sport that once was their haven and now serves as their alleged place of abuse. One of the girls, who quit early in her junior year, stated that “when I came in you couldn’t have convinced me I wasn’t going to finish my 4 years.” When I asked the same girl I had known since before school if she would ever consider playing again, she replied coolly that she was not even sure she would let her children play after knowing what the environment could be like.

Chapter 7:

Athletics originated as and continue to be an unequal field. Men only allowed women to participate when they would personally benefit, whether it be for the purposes of sustaining women’s physical health for future childbearing, or helping women maintain an appealing figure for men’s viewing pleasures. Even when women were the actors in the athletic world, like when men supervised women’s meets, the University put them under the jurisdiction and scrutiny of the men who were always posited as their superiors. The limited attention and opportunities female athletes were given reflected the male dominated attitude inherent in athletics. While

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96 Basketball Player. Personal Interview. 17 October 2019.
many things around gender parity have changed, including the creation and implementation of Title IX, gender-based issues that started in Pembroke persist into the present.

The facilities and opportunities that existed at the onset of athletics, prior to legal measures, reflected this. Women struggled to receive the respect and space that was afforded to seven-year-old boys, the nude faculty members who used the pool, or their male peers who might, goodness gracious, see female students in athletic wear. Women were expected to defer to men, regardless of age or experience, because they were inherently inferior and the monetary resources given to them, especially in comparison to their male peers, reflected this.

Women today no longer contend with as blatant of a discrepancy in economic resources. However, the qualitative elements of their program still indicate this initial inequity. Just as Pembroke women fought for media attention, like in the days of the Panda Bears, so too are teams like rugby forced to demand their due respect. Additionally, the lack of attention paid to the needs and desires of female athletes still looms large. This phenomenon used to be seen in the lack of true competition afforded to these women by their more powerful male peers. Now, it can be noted in the ways in which the university allegedly ignores abusive coaching, from both male and female coaches, and its pernicious impact on female athletes. While things have nominally changed for the better, there are still many ways in which inequities persist.

Despite the historical economic discrepancies, women were able to eke out some opportunities to pursue their passions. The work of Pembroke students and faculties resulted in one of the university’s first acts of student defiance through the creation of the Tennis Association, which eventually led to the blossoming of club sports, the construction of Sayles Gym by raising money through student, staff and alumnae performances and the leadership place
of women on coeducational sporting teams like the sailing club. Women won these small victories through their tenacity. This mindset informed and spurred on the work of students in the court case.

They often, though, had to face intense vitriol and constriction from male administrators and Brown University students through means of gender based norms and archaic and deeply sexist understandings of what women could and should achieve. Women had to fight for opportunities that men received, but because of their love for athletics, were able to carve out some space for their interests. In the present, this attitude manifests in the ways in which athletes fight for their team presence, whether it be asserting their right to a field or contacting the social media page that neglected to mention their game and eventual victory.

This does not even touch upon one of the most impressive things that resulted from women’s athletics: the creations of female leadership and jurisdiction. Since men did not feel a need to be involved in something so “trivial,” women were actually allowed to make decisions for themselves and have some modicum of autonomy. Athletics provided one of the first opportunities for women to actually teach other women, since nearly all professors were men, and for female coaches and administrators to demand what they actually wanted to see in their own curriculums, although under the larger norms and expectations of the time for women.

Because of female leadership in the realm of coaching, women pushed for sports they wanted to play, like hockey, and to facilitate their own opportunities for competition, like the creation of a schedule that allowed the hockey team to play Canadian teams. Even though the university made women like Arlene Gorton feel that “it’s a privilege to play [sports] and so you
got to help like a family, pick up the budget, “97 this space and autonomy proved beneficial for female coaches. Student athletes were even able to get in on this action, although stilted by the presence of gender norms that both men and other women enforced, by carving out spaces for themselves as athletes and leaders on their own campus and within tight-knit teams.

Paradoxically, the merger of the two universities, under the auspices of furthering women’s rights, harmed the interests of women. As seen by Gorton and women on the sailing club, as well as a bevy of other athletic teams, the encroachment of men eradicated one of the few spaces of autonomy women had by directly imposing the influence and desires of men on female teams, coaches and administrators. Men began to take over full leadership on clubs that women used to control, they ousted tenured and valuable female athletic faculty in lieu of male coaches and overall were then able to more directly ensure that women were following heterosexual norms.

Today this persists in the gender norms that force women to toughen up and subjects female coaches, even head coaches, to the will of their male peers. It has taken remarkable fortitude and insight for coaches like the women’s swimming team to give female athletes back some of this important autonomy. While the eradication of Pembroke facilitated some strides towards true gender equity in all realms, including athletics, it also created some intense setbacks for women whose ramifications linger on the current program.

Besides the obvious that history is fascinating and reveals a lot about the ways in which women were treated and perceived from the late 1800s until the late 1900s, it also illuminates a lot of the current injustices that exist in the present. Just because the university nominally

97 Gorton, Transcript – Arlene Gorton, Class of 1952.
complies with Title IX in regards to quantitative issues like the number of teams that exist, and
the money expounded upon equipment and travel, does not mean that the qualitative issues that
underlie gendered teams have been eradicated. The effects of removing female coaches, and
more broadly speaking women’s athletic autonomy, for male coaches, the lack of media attention
to these teams and the ever present gender norms and expectations around women’s conduct and
appearance linger and hold great sway in the present. By understanding these purportedly past
injustices that women incurred, we can better understand and work to deconstruct their current
manifestations and pernicious effects. The progression of time does not ensure the progression of
gender equity.
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