

**American Runner Kathy Switzer:
How Title IX Changed America**

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Junior Division

Look around you on any summer day. You will see women of all ages participating in sports such as soccer, softball, basketball, and jogging for fitness or training for a 5k run. We see so many women participating in sports today, we may forget that for a very long time women did not, and were not, allowed to compete in sports. Many believe the main reason why females are now allowed to participate in sports is because of legendary marathon runner Kathy Switzer and her first Boston Marathon run in 1967. Following Kathy's first Boston Marathon, the Education Amendments of 1972 included the new law Title IX which banned any type of discrimination in academics and sports based on gender. Kathy's historic run opened the door to the acceptance of females in competitive sports. This new acceptance of women's sports eventually resulted in the idea of Title IX, which gave women and girls the right to participate in any sport or sporting competition. Leading up to this shift in society, we will discuss the American attitudes toward women's sports before Kathy Switzer and Title IX. Next we will explore Kathy's first Boston Marathon run and the eventual passage of Title IX. Lastly, we will review the changes after Title IX and the thoughts and opinions of three generations of females, and how they've experienced sports in their lifetime. Historical theories of why females should not participate in sports seem old fashioned to us now, in today's society, the benefits women get from participating in sports is well known.

Try to imagine today's society without women's sports. Society had no room for women's sports before Kathy Switzer's first Boston Marathon run in 1967. Women had very few, or no, opportunities to compete in sports at all. In an interview with my grandmother Bernadette Byrnes, she spoke about her experiences with sports growing up. She told me that while she attended high school in Cashton, WI from 1952-1956, "Girls had no options for sports in school, except for softball and basketball in Phy. Ed class. Even then girls only got to use half of the court to play basketball."¹ Nobody thought that women and girls should participate in sports. Until the late 1960's in America, it was a social norm that men took on more serious roles in business, law, and entertainment. "Publically, men were cast as the competitors in amoral, economic, and political realms, whereas women were positioned as decorative acquisitions or as guardians of men's immortal souls."² Women were seen as delicate and too weak to participate in sports. Some families tried to oppose this by creating a new "sport" for girls. In 1898, local groups supported all-female cheerleading squads to keep traditional feminine roles.³ Although cheerleading was introduced for girls, it wasn't much of a sport, as it was meant for them to not hurt themselves.

¹ Niemuth, Sara, and Bernadette Byrnes. "Interview with Bernadette Byrnes." 14 Dec. 2017.

² .Hogshead-Makar, Nancy, and Andrew S. Zimbalist. *Equal Play: Title IX and Social Change*. Temple University Press, 2008.

³ ."Cheering on Women and Girls in Sports: Using Title IX to Fight Gender Role Oppression." *Harvard Law Review*, vol. 110, no. 7, 1997, p. 1627., doi:10.2307/1342183.

But cheerleading wasn't just made to give girls a safe sport, "The support of cheerleading comes at a time when an increasing number of high school girls are playing traditionally male sports."⁴



(Photo Source:Capillo, Joe, et al. *Gloucester High School Cheerleaders, 1953*. Gloucester, MA, 22 Oct. 2007)

Schools created cheerleading to prevent female students from playing male sports. Before the movement for gender equality, "Girls were taught to maintain their appearance and to protect themselves from any activity that could mar it."⁵ From a young age, girls were told not to

⁴ "Cheering on Women and Girls in Sports: Using Title IX to Fight Gender Role Oppression." *Harvard Law Review*, vol. 110, no. 7, 1997, p. 1627., doi:10.2307/1342183.

⁵ "Cheering on Women and Girls in Sports: Using Title IX to Fight Gender Role Oppression." *Harvard Law Review*, vol. 110, no. 7, 1997, p. 1627., doi:10.2307/1342183.

damage their appearance, so girls grew up not wanting to play sports. Girls were excluded from sports in a number of ways. A few theories were that women were too weak and the idea that sports would make girls into lesbians.. A very old theory was that if a woman exerted herself too much, she would “redirect the energy from the womb, and she would not be able to conceive/have children.”⁶ At the time, a woman's duty was to take care of the husband, and raise children. If they were not able to have children, they feared that they wouldn't be fulfilling their assigned role. Another was that women were “too weak” or “not created” for sports. Homophobia was used as a way to scare women and young girls away from participating in sports. Before Title IX, “some people believed that if women participated in sports, it would turn them into homosexuals.”⁷ Women and young girls were scared of becoming homosexuals because at that time, it was thought to be wrong. The time period before Kathy Switzer's marathon run in 1967 and the Title IX changes in 1972, was very hard for the small but determined females who wanted to participate in sports.

In the 1960's, no one would have ever imagined a woman participating in the biggest running race in the country, nor would they imagine a national shift because of it. That's what Kathy (K.V.) Switzer did. She was the first woman to run in the Boston Marathon, even though it was a male-only race in 1967. I had a one-on-one email communication with Ms. Switzer for this project and she pointed me towards her frequently asked questions from her website. I learned some very interesting information about her experiences in sports. In her childhood

⁶“Blog.” *Women's Sports History*,
gph.ucsd.edu/cgeh/BLOG/Pages/Women%27sSportsHistory.aspx.

⁷ .Hogshead-Makar, Nancy, and Andrew S. Zimbalist. *Equal Play: Title IX and Social Change*. Temple University Press, 2008.

years, there were few opportunities for her in sports. She started running on her own for fun at age 12, and her father encouraged her to try out for the field hockey team.⁸ I asked her what motivated her to run the Boston Marathon, and she replied, “Whenever I ran on my own, I felt so strong and powerful and free of judgement. The challenge of 26.2 miles intrigued me and I wanted to run it.”⁹ Before the race, Kathy slipped in unnoticed in two smart ways. First, she had to get an okay from her doctor that she was fit to run, and she managed to exclude the fact that she was a female. Second, she signed into the race as K.V. Switzer to hide her feminine name. Also, she had wanted to sign her name in a way that many famous authors did, as she had wanted to be an author for her whole life.¹⁰ After she registered for the race, she was given the bib number 261. During the race, many of the male runners around her were happy to have a female in the race and many of them helped in driving off officials trying to remove her from the race. About 10 minutes into the race she was pushed and shoved by a race official while running. The official was trying to physically remove her from the race. Her coach Arnie Briggs and then boyfriend Tom Miller, got involved and helped her to escape from the angry officials and waves of camera trucks. She managed to get away while her friends held the official back. She was determined to finish after that.¹¹ She did finish, with a time of four hours and twenty minutes.¹² While she made history with her first marathon run, she did experience major consequences

⁸ “Personal Communication (via E-Mail).” Received by Kathrine Switzer, *Personal Communication (via E-Mail)*, 6 Dec. 2017.

⁹ “Personal Communication (via E-Mail).” Received by Kathrine Switzer, *Personal Communication (via E-Mail)*, 6 Dec. 2017.

¹⁰ “Personal Communication (via E-Mail).” Received by Kathrine Switzer, *Personal Communication (via E-Mail)*, 6 Dec. 2017.

¹¹ “1967 Boston Marathon: The Real Story.” *Kathrine Switzer - Marathon Woman*, kathrineswitzer.com/about-kathrine/1967-boston-marathon-the-real-story/.

¹² “1967 Boston Marathon: The Real Story.” *Kathrine Switzer - Marathon Woman*, kathrineswitzer.com/about-kathrine/1967-boston-marathon-the-real-story/.

afterward. She was disqualified after the race and she was expelled from the Amateur Athletic Union, which was a small organization that was working to get women into sports. But, these consequences didn't stop her from spreading a message. People realized that women could run, and the effort for women's equality in sports began. Many reporters asked her if she was trying to prove something by running, but the truth is that she just wanted to run.¹³ Also in Kathy's website, I learned that her life had changed in every way after her run. She became a famous runner around the world. I learned that her 7th Boston Marathon was her fastest time and she placed second, with a time of 2 hours, 51 minutes, and 37 seconds. She was also named runner of the decade in 1976.¹⁴ She helped get women into Olympic running events¹⁵ by supporting and founding women's running groups and events. In all, Kathy ran 16 Boston, 12 New York, 11 Pittsburgh, and 4 Los Angeles marathons, along with multiple other marathons and races around the world. Frequently, she wore her famous bib number, 261, which was eventually retired by the Boston Marathon in honor of her historic run and accomplishments.

¹³ "Personal Communication (via E-Mail)." Received by Kathrine Switzer, *Personal Communication (via E-Mail)*, 6 Dec. 2017.

¹⁴ Christensen, Karen, et al. *International Encyclopedia of Women and Sports*. Macmillan Reference, 2001.

¹⁵ "Personal Communication (via E-Mail)." Received by Kathrine Switzer, *Personal Communication (via E-Mail)*, 6 Dec. 2017.



(Photo Source: Rothman, Lilly. "Title IX at 45: Amendment's Early Impact on Women's Sports." *Time*, Time, 23 June 2017, time.com/4822600/title-ix-womens-sports/.)

Most recently, she ran the Boston Marathon again at age 70 in August, 2017. Kathy Switzer's amazing career led to a change in the American society as well. Five years after her famous run, a new law was introduced in 1972. This new law was called Title IX, and it was part of the Education Amendments of 1972. Title IX specifically says, "No person in the [US] shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from any education program or activity receiving federal financial assistance."¹⁶ Title IX was also controversial. A lot of people didn't want the law to be passed, and argued that Title IX would just let women join in rather than make a difference.¹⁷ But "On June 23, 1972, president Richard Nixon signed the law that would simply become known as Title

¹⁶ Simon, Rita J. *Sporting Equality: Title IX Thirty Years Later*. Transaction Publishers, 2005.

¹⁷ "Cheering on Women and Girls in Sports: Using Title IX to Fight Gender Role Oppression." *Harvard Law Review*, vol. 110, no. 7, 1997, p. 1627., doi:10.2307/1342183.

IX.”¹⁸ Major sports groups such as the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) opposed the move for Title IX and its plans.¹⁹ Other groups such as the AIAW, the Association for Intercollegiate Athletics for Women, didn’t agree with the NCAA. However the AIAW succeeded in promoting college sports for women.²⁰ At the time when Title IX was created and approved, Senator Birch Bayh of Indiana stated that, “It is an important first step in the effort to provide for the women of America something that is rightfully theirs.”²¹ Title IX benefitted women so much and still does today. Title IX was one of the most significant moments in the strive for equality in sports.

Kathy Switzer’s 1967 Boston Marathon run and the creation and approval of Title IX, changed the U.S. immensely. They both contributed to females having the right to participate and compete in any sport or activity. After the first big steps in creating equality for women, many sporting opportunities opened up for them. The reality was that along with social change came social discomfort. “As women came to be involved in sports, society didn’t have an easy time knowing what to make of the new role of women as athletes.”²² Many people didn't want to have females in the world of sports, but the persistence of women and feminist supporters helped to achieve the goal of equality in sports. After Title IX was passed, many large changes to

¹⁸Rothman, Lilly. “Title IX at 45: Amendment's Early Impact on Women's Sports.” *Time*, Time, 23 June 2017, time.com/4822600/title-ix-womens-sports/.

¹⁹ Christensen, Karen, et al. *International Encyclopedia of Women and Sports*. Macmillan Reference, 2001.

²⁰ Christensen, Karen, et al. *International Encyclopedia of Women and Sports*. Macmillan Reference, 2001.

²¹Rothman, Lilly. “Title IX at 45: Amendment's Early Impact on Women's Sports.” *Time*, Time, 23 June 2017, time.com/4822600/title-ix-womens-sports/.

²² .Hogshead-Makar, Nancy, and Andrew S. Zimbalist. *Equal Play: Title IX and Social Change*. Temple University Press, 2008.

society were made. “The budget for women’s sports at North Carolina State University had multiplied by 15 in just four years.”²³ “The University of Michigan hadn’t had a single formal competitive sport for women in 1973; five years later, it had 10 varsity teams.”²⁴ In 1996, “The U.S. sent more female athletes to the 1996 Summer Olympics than ever before, and were symbolized by the image of four-foot nine, eighty pound gymnast Kerri Strugg.”²⁵ Also at the 1996 Atlanta Olympics, “The Title IX babies’ won gold in gymnastics, softball, basketball, soccer, and synchronized swimming.”²⁶



(Photo Source: Sivlerman, Barton. 23 July 1996)

²³ .Rothman, Lilly. “Title IX at 45: Amendment’s Early Impact on Women’s Sports.” *Time*, Time, 23 June 2017, time.com/4822600/title-ix-womens-sports/.

²⁴ .Rothman, Lilly. “Title IX at 45: Amendment’s Early Impact on Women’s Sports.” *Time*, Time, 23 June 2017, time.com/4822600/title-ix-womens-sports/.

²⁵ “Cheering on Women and Girls in Sports: Using Title IX to Fight Gender Role Oppression.” *Harvard Law Review*, vol. 110, no. 7, 1997, p. 1627., doi:10.2307/1342183.

²⁶ Blumenthal, Karen. *Let Me Play: the Story of Title IX: the Law That Changed the Future of Girls in America*. Atheneum Books for Young Readers, 2005.

Many women have received awards or medals for their achievements. “On August 12, 2009, Billie Jean King received the Presidential Medal of Freedom, America’s highest civilian honor, from President Barack Obama.”²⁷ With the amount of women receiving awards for their accomplishments in sports, it shows how far females have come in the world of sports. But, there is still room for improvement, “Currently, women can only compete one-on-one with men in equestrian events during the Olympics. In the 2016 Rio Olympics, there were only two women-only events: synchronized swimming and rhythmic gymnastics.”²⁸

Despite this, women and girls also benefited greatly from being allowed to participate and compete in sports. “Sports can help girls develop better relationships with their bodies... helps them gain confidence in their everyday interactions... helps them to realize how great they are... and build the confidence they’ll need in the workplace and for the rest of their lives.”²⁹ I interviewed some of my close friends and family, across three generations, to ask them about their experiences with sports growing up. My grandmother Bernadette Byrnes had no competitive sports options growing up, though she had baseball and basketball in gym class.³⁰ My mother Susan Byrnes’ high school in the 1980’s had five competitive sports teams for girls: volleyball, basketball, softball, tennis, and track. She competed in volleyball as well as dance line, and those activities were a big part of her high school years.³¹ My mother told me that

²⁷ Ware, Susan. *Game, Set, Match: Billie Jean King and the Revolution in Women’s Sports*. Univ Of North Carolina Pr, 2015.

²⁸ <https://www.pri.org/stories/2016-08-17/see-120-years-struggle-gender-equality-olympics>. “See 120 Years of Struggle for Gender Equality at the Olympics.” *Public Radio International*, www.pri.org/stories/2016-08-17/see-120-years-struggle-gender-equality-olympics.

²⁹ “Cheering on Women and Girls in Sports: Using Title IX to Fight Gender Role Oppression.” *Harvard Law Review*, vol. 110, no. 7, 1997, p. 1627., doi:10.2307/1342183

³⁰ Niemuth, Sara, and Bernadette Byrnes. “Interview with Bernadette Byrnes.” 14 Dec. 2017.

³¹ Niemuth, Sara, and Susan Byrnes. “Interview with Susan Byrnes.” 4 Dec. 2017.

nobody explained that competitive sports may have lead to college scholarships.³² My good friend Bethany Rahn, is age 13 and is an 8th grade student at DC Everest Junior High. She competes in swimming, softball, and track. She has had many successes in her sports career. Bethany has dozens of options to compete in sports. Bethany went to the national swim meet at age 11 and placed seventh in the nation for her age group. Bethany told me “I participate in swimming and softball. They mean the world to me! I don't know what I would do if I didn't have sports in my life.”³³ Although Bethany has had many major victories in her sports career, she has also had some downfalls too. She said “I’ve had a lot of success in my sports, but also a lot of disappointment. Sports taught me how to cope and overcome that.”³⁴ In her high school years, Bethany will have 18 sports opportunities for her to choose from. Bethany also hopes to compete in college sports.³⁵ Kathy Switzer and Title IX gave Bethany and so many other girls like her that opportunity. All three of these interviews prove to me how much women’s sports has changed over time. From the mid-1900’s to the early 2000’s, there has been a lot of change. Over just three generations of women, each have had different experiences with sports. Kathy Switzer’s first Boston Marathon and Title IX has made such a difference in women’s sports. In just 45 years, it has gone from very few competitive sports, to dozens of competitive sports being offered to females.

Kathy Switzer’s 1967 Boston Marathon kick-started the movement for women’s equality in sports. This movement eventually created the law Title IX, which gave women and girls the

³² Niemuth, Sara, and Susan Byrnes. “Interview with Susan Byrnes.” 4 Dec. 2017.

³³Niemuth, Sara, and Bethany Rahn. “Interview with Bethany Rahn .” 12 Dec. 2017.

³⁴ Niemuth, Sara, and Bethany Rahn. “Interview with Bethany Rahn .” 12 Dec. 2017.

³⁵ Niemuth, Sara, and Bethany Rahn. “Interview with Bethany Rahn .” 12 Dec. 2017.

opportunity to compete in a wide variety of sporting events. In this paper, we looked at the time period before the women's sports equality movement, and during Kathy's run and the passage of Title IX. Then we looked at what happened after Kathy's run and the creation of Title IX, along the experiences of three generations of women from before, during, and after the change in sports. Kathy Switzer's history-making Boston Marathon in 1967 was the first big step in creating equality in sports. It was so strong that a new set of laws was passed that banned any discrimination based on gender. With that, it benefited many American females from 1972-2018 and beyond. Women's sports has changed immensely, but it was for the best reasons.

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kathrineswitzer.com/about-kathrine/1967-boston-marathon-the-real-story/.

This is a primary source because it is Kathy's website. It's made by her, and it has her words in it to tell her story. It tells about her experience down to the second, what she was feeling and thinking about during her first Boston marathon.

"Cheering on Women and Girls in Sports: Using Title IX to Fight Gender Role Oppression."

Harvard Law Review, vol. 110, no. 7, 1997, p. 1627., doi:10.2307/1342183.

This journal piece is a primary source because it was from the time period in which Kathy was making history. It writes about what women's sports were like before, and during Title IX. It tells of how people in society thought about women's sports, and how

it was accepted.

Niemuth, Sara, and Susan Byrnes. "Interview with Susan Byrnes." 4 Dec. 2017.

This is a primary source because I interviewed my mother, Susan Byrnes and asked her about her experiences with sports growing up, and how she thinks about girls now having many more opportunities to participate in sports, she gave me her opinion on women sports history, and how she thinks it's grown over time.

"Personal Communication (via E-Mail)." Received by Kathrine Switzer, *Personal Communication (via E-Mail)*, 6 Dec. 2017.

This is a primary source because it was a personal communication with Catherine Switzer. I spoke with her, and she answered my direct questions with direct answers, using her experience, from her first race.

Niemuth, Sara, and Bethany Rahn. "Interview with Bethany Rahn ." 12 Dec. 2017.

This is a primary source because I spoke with my good friend Bethany Rahn, and I questioned her on her thoughts about sports in her generation. In her generation there are a lot more sports opportunities for her and her peers. She shared her direct thoughts with me on the women sports of past, present, and possibly the future.

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Niemuth, Sara, and Bernadette Byrnes. "Interview with Bernadette Byrnes." 14 Dec. 2017.

This is a primary source because I spoke with my grandmother, Bernadette Burns, and asked her questions about how she lived with sports, and grew up with them. She told me that she had no sports options growing up, and I asked her questions based on her experience in sports and how she thinks it's changed over time.

Sivlerman, Barton. 23 July 1996.

This is a primary source because this photo was taken during the time period, at the 1996 Atlanta Olympics, capturing the group of women on the podium with medals. These women were sent to the olympics after and nicknamed "Title IX Babies."

Rothman, Lilly. "Title IX at 45: Amendment's Early Impact on Women's Sports." *Time*, Time,

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June 2017, time.com/4822600/title-ix-womens-sports/.

This photo is a primary source because it is combined photo of Kathy Switzer from her first Boston Marathon, and a race official who tried to physically remove her from the race. It also shows her in her most recent Boston Marathon, wearing her famous bib number 261, and crossing the finish line at age 70.

Capillo, Joe, et al. *Gloucester High School Cheerleaders, 1953*. Gloucester, MA, 22 Oct. 2007.

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greatly in project. It allowed me to get an amazing view on what it was like for women before the movement for equality in sports.

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Hogshead-Makar, Nancy, and Andrew S. Zimbalist. *Equal Play: Title IX and Social Change*. Temple University Press, 2008.

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This is a secondary source because it was not made during the time of Title IX , but it did give a look at women’s rights in sports 30 years after Title IX was created, and how women's sports are doing today.

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This is a secondary source because it was not made during the time of Billie Jean King's history making tennis career, but it did show evidence as to how women have evolved in sports, and how history has been changed due to women's rights in sports.