

For the rest, I recommend this book because of the good humor in which it is written. If Professor Baumeister is against anything or anybody (which I doubt), it is those who would ignore some serious issues about the currently precarious situation of boys and men and might in so doing fail to estimate accurately the cost of disregarding what is good about men in 21st century culture.

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Paul Lonardo, *STRIKE IX: THE STORY OF A BIG EAST COLLEGE FORCED TO ELIMINATE ITS BASEBALL PROGRAM AND THE TEAM THAT REFUSED TO LOSE*, Concord: Infinity Publishing (2009).



American males are expected to be good sports. In the United States boys routinely undergo non-consensual genital cutting (although subjecting girls to any form of circumcision is illegal in this country); young men are required to register for selective military service (although young women are not); and men are persistently underrepresented in higher education classrooms (although, as the American Association of University Women reports, women have earned the majority of bachelor degrees since 1982, and they now also earn most graduate degrees). American men are, moreover, often disadvantaged by parenting and gender-equality laws, and their average life expectancy is lower than women's (currently, 75.3 years versus 80.4, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention). The fact that most American males currently accept these disparities is a testament to their customary stoic response to trying circumstances.

Men are, however, overrepresented on the playing fields of the United States; consequently, male athletic teams supported by many American educational institutions are subject to legal remedies governed by Title IX of the Education Amendments Act of 1972, which states that "[n]o person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance," with expedient exemptions granted to single-sex schools and voluntary youth organizations such as the Y.M.C.A. While the Education Amendments Act is supposed to affect all aspects of higher education, it is generally applied in cases where women are underrepresented in athletics. Usually, the prescribed remediation adversely affects men's teams. Title IX compliance often involves the elimination of men's teams rather than the addition of women's teams. Scarce resources have made gender equality for athletes a zero-sum game. Paul Lonardo's *Strike IX* documents the final season of Providence College's baseball team when college administrators had decided that achieving gender equality in sports would entail the loss of men students' opportunities to play baseball, golf, and tennis at this majority-women-student school.

At Providence College, conforming to federal gender-equality quotas and providing the same resources for students of both sexes trumped students' need for gender equity and the provision of appropriate supports for both sexes to excel. Imposed standards of gender equality, rather than real indicators of different male vs. female students'



involvement in sports, were the deciding factor; in other words, as Lonardo astutely remarks, the test for assessing compliance with the law “fails to take into account differing levels of interest with regard to the gender of athletes.” Some women’s special-interest groups responded to this implementation of Title IX disingenuously (the Women’s Sports Foundation asserted it “is not in favor of reducing athletic opportunities for men as the preferred method of achieving Title IX compliance” but rather, as the Foundation’s position suggests, “reducing excess expenditures”) and dogmatically (a spokeswoman for the National Women’s Law Center expressed her desire, “to bring immediate law suits against as many universities as possible to force them to comply with the law”). Women allies at the College, however, clearly supported the baseball players. The women’s field hockey, soccer, and tennis teams threatened to boycott their games in solidarity with the cut men’s teams, and the women’s volleyball team wore Providence College Friars baseball uniform jerseys during their warm-up before their first game. Swimmer Michelle Hackmer spoke for many when she remarked: “Sure, we want women athletes to be treated fairly, but at this expense? I don’t think this is what Title IX was supposed to be about.”

Strike IX describes a critical consequence of Title IX: the elimination of an opportunity for men to experience appropriate embodied learning. Lonardo provides edifying statistical records of the players’ and the team’s performance, but the men’s story is what really counts. Rather than transfer to other institutions that would gladly have allowed athletes of their caliber to play, most team members dedicated themselves to playing the best possible season at Providence College. Though they initially reacted to their loss of funding angrily and recklessly (deciding, “to get fucked up, loud, and laid”), these men soon channeled their energies toward achieving excellence. Their “official rally cry became, “THERE’S ONLY ONE THING LEFT TO DO... WIN THE WHOLE %@!()& THING.” (Lonardo quips: “It really did say %@!()&. This is a Catholic school after all.”) The Providence Friars did not win the whole thing; however, they won the respect of the college baseball community. During the final inning against the victorious Florida State team, the Florida fans joined the Providence fans, “in saluting the team with a rousing standing ovation”—a celebration of sportsmanship at its best.

Lonardo includes brief biographical updates that detail the respective fates of several players, and one might argue that their success after school demonstrates the minimal impact of Title IX on these men. This reasoning fails to grasp the greater lesson of *Strike IX*. Men deserve gender equity as well as gender equality. Men should not have to settle for being good sports in the face of institutional disparities. Title IX should guarantee men “the benefits of” both “educational program and activity,” and that should include some remedy for the under-representation of men, as well as the lack of appropriate support for men, in higher education.

American men are, however, organizing. Five months after the publication of this book, a suit was filed against Columbia University demanding gender equity and equality for men in the allocation of resources. Although that suit failed, it will certainly not be the last legal attempt at social justice for men. Concerning their education men are increasingly refusing to lose.

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