

Soccer, Salaries and Sexism

Compelling Question: How do sports both reflect and perpetuate sexism?

Grade Level		Time	Common Core Standards
K-2	3-5	45 Minutes	Reading: R1 Speaking & Listening: SL1 Language: L4, L6
MS	HS		



Web Related Connections

Lessons

[7 Ideas for Teaching](#)

[Women's History Month](#)

[Barbie, Identity and Representation](#)

[Mo'Ne Davis and Gender Stereotypes](#)

Other Resources

[Challenging Biased Language](#)

[Women's History Month Resources](#)

[Women's Soccer Team Takes a Stand](#)

[Scientist Drawings and Gender Stereotypes](#)

[Sexual Harassment in the News](#)

Key Words

accuse
class action suit
commercial
complaints
discrimination
governing
inequity
institutionalized
lawsuit
market
negotiation
proposal
sexism
treatment
wage

LESSON OVERVIEW

On March 8, 2019 (International Women's Day), the U.S. women's soccer team filed a gender discrimination suit against U.S. Soccer Federation, which governs soccer in the U.S. The soccer team's complaint alleged pay inequities, and inferior support and working conditions. In their statement released by the team, the players described "institutionalized gender discrimination" that they say has existed for years. This lawsuit raised the larger issue of equity in women's sports and prompted a conversation about the history of women and sports.

In May 2020, the U.S. District Court Judge for the Central District of California rejected the team's argument over receiving lower pay than the U.S. men's team. He also dismissed a claim of unequal working conditions related to the number of turf and real grass pitches. After the ruling, a spokesperson for the team promised that the team "will appeal and press on." In February 2022, a settlement about compensation was reached. The players, a group of several dozen current and former players, shared in \$24 million in payments from U.S. Soccer.

This lesson provides an opportunity for students to learn more about the U.S. women's soccer team's lawsuit against the U.S. Soccer Federation, understand this history of women, sports and Title IX and reflect on how sexism manifests in a variety of ways in women's sports.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Students will learn about how and why the U.S. women's soccer team sued U.S. Soccer.
- Students will gain knowledge in the history and impact of Title IX.
- Students will understand what sexism is and how it manifests in sports.
- Students will reflect on possible actions to take in addressing sexism in sports.

MATERIALS & PREPARATION

- Create and post, on opposite sides of the room, two signs with the following words: (1) TRUE and (2) FALSE
- [Women and Sports Quiz and Answer Key](#) (for teacher, optional: prepare as PowerPoint slides)
- "[Citing gender discrimination, U.S. women's soccer team files lawsuit](#)," one copy for each student)

- (Optional) *US women's soccer team sues for discrimination* video (2019, 2 mins., Star TV, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bQvF5nJL8hU>)
- (Optional) WiFi, internet, computer, screen or LCD projector, speakers

PROCEDURES



Information Sharing

1. Begin the lesson by asking students: *Have you heard anything about what is happening with the U.S. Women's soccer team?*
2. Explain that in March 2019, the U.S. women's soccer team filed a gender discrimination suit against the U.S. Soccer Federation, which governs soccer in the U.S. Their suit alleged pay inequities, and inferior support and working conditions. In their statement released by the team, the twenty-eight players described "institutionalized gender discrimination" that they say existed for years.

In May 2020, the U.S. District Court Judge for the Central District of California rejected the team's argument over receiving lower pay than the U.S. men's team. He also dismissed a claim of unequal working conditions related to the number of turf and real grass pitches. After the ruling, a spokesperson for the team promised that the team "will appeal and press on."

In February 2022, a settlement about compensation was reached. The players, a group of several dozen current and former players, shared \$24 million in payments from U.S. Soccer. The majority of that amount is back pay, an unspoken admission about the inequities of men's and women's compensation in U.S. soccer. Further, U.S. Soccer pledged to equalize pay between the men's and women's national teams in all competitions, including the World Cup. These collective bargaining agreements will run through 2028.

3. Explain to students that they will learn more about the lawsuit as well as information about women and sports.

Quiz: Women and Sports

1. Explain to students that they are going to learn more about women and sports by taking a verbal true and false quiz. Tell students you will read statements aloud and if they think the statement is true, they should move to the side of the room with the posted sign that reads "true." If students think the statement is false, they should move to the other side of the room with the posted sign that reads "false." Explain that even though they might be unsure, they should give it their best guess.

Alternative: Make this a paper and pencil quiz, invite students to hold up true/false cards or use one-to-one classroom technology to poll students.

2. Read each question from the [Women and Sports Quiz and Answer Key](#). After each question is read and students are situated in their spots, ask a few from each side to explain why they answered true or false. After sharing, tell them the correct answer, and read the explanation or display the explanations in a PowerPoint presentation or Google slides.
3. After going through all the questions in the quiz, engage students in a discussion by asking the following questions:
 - What is your reaction to the information you heard?
 - What was surprising? What wasn't surprising?
 - What did you learn that you didn't know before?
 - Do you think progress has been made around women and sports?
 - What do you think still needs improvement?
 - What do you think is the reason(s) for the disparities between women's and men's sports?
 - What other questions do you have?

Defining Terminology: What is Sexism?

1. Ask students: *What is sexism?* Elicit/explain a definition of **sexism** as follows:

Sexism: The marginalization and/or oppression of women, based on the belief in a natural order based on sex that privileges men.

2. Explain that sexism can be *interpersonal* or *institutional*. Ask students for suggestions as to what this means, and then share the following definition and distinction between personal and institutional, including the example:

Personal manifestations of prejudice or discrimination include individual acts of bias, meanness or exclusion.

Institutional manifestations of prejudice or discrimination include policies and practices that are supported and sanctioned by power and authority, and that benefit some and disadvantage others.

Example: Sexism is considered personal when someone tells a joke or makes a remark that demeans a woman (because the interaction is happening between people/individuals). Sexism is considered institutional when women are paid less money than men for doing the same or comparable job (because the injustice is instituted and perpetuated by institutions/organizations in society).

3. Ask students: *What are some examples of sexism you have seen either in interpersonal relationships or on an institutional level in society?* Record their responses on the board/smart board. If students have not contributed any suggestions based on the information shared from the quiz above about women and sports, ask: *What are some examples from what you've learned already about women and sports?*



Reading Activity

1. Distribute the article "[Citing gender discrimination, U.S. women's soccer team files lawsuit](#)" to each student.

NOTE: This article is from [Newsela](#), which publishes high-interest news articles daily at different reading levels. This article above is a 7th grade reading level. It is also available at grades 3, 5, 9 and 12th grade levels. For access to the other leveled articles, you can register for free.

2. (Optional) After students read the article, show this 2-minute video, [US women's soccer team sues for discrimination](#).
3. Engage students in a class discussion by asking the following questions:
 - Why did the U.S. women's national soccer team sue the U.S. Soccer Federation?
 - How did the women's and men's soccer teams differ in their performance and success?
 - How did the women's and men's soccer teams differ in how they are treated?
 - What did the lawsuit have to do with gender equality?
 - Why do you think U.S. Women's Soccer Team file the lawsuit on International Women's Day (March 8)?
 - What did you learn that you didn't know before?
 - If you were the judge in the case, what factors would you consider in making your decision?
 - In general, what ideas do you have about bringing more equity to women in sports?

Developing a Plan of Action

1. Explain that in this specific case of the U.S. women's soccer team, the team filed a lawsuit to address the inequality that they experienced. Previous to that in 2016, five members of the U.S. women's team alleged wage discrimination in a complaint with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission.
2. Ask students: *In this case, what are other actions the team could have taken? What have allies done to support the team or more generally raise the issue of gender equity in sports?* Brainstorm a list of ideas, which could include some of the following:
 - Write letters to U.S. Soccer, and let them know your thoughts about the lawsuit.

- Write letters to the players of the U.S. women's soccer team to express your support.
- Hold an educational forum in school that explores women's equity in sports.
- Find out more information about the support, both financial and otherwise, your school or local college provides to girls/women sports teams.
- Write a letter to your school or community newspaper expressing your thoughts about this issue.
- Support women's sports by going to or watching their games.
- Reach out to local or national media and encourage them to cover more women's games.

Closing

Have students do a go-round and share aloud one thing they learned today.

ADDITIONAL READING AND RESOURCES

- [Women's Sports Media Coverage is Booming. Here is How it Can Grow Even Faster](#) (Parity, March 6, 2024)
- [Men Far Outnumber Women on Coaching Staffs in College Sports](#) (USA Facts, May 6, 2023)
- [Growing Participation, Widening Funding Gap](#) (Inside Higher Ed, June 27, 2022)
- ["A Look Back at Women's History Since Title IX's Passage"](#) (Women's Sports Foundation, March 14, 2017)
- [Examining the Gender Pay Gap in Elite Sports](#) (Witi 30)
- [How Title IX First Changed the World of Women's Sports](#) (*TIME*, June 23, 2017)
- ["Media Coverage and Female Athletes"](#) (Rewire, August 10, 2016)
- ["No Matter The Sport, Women Athletes Are Always Paid Less"](#) (WBUR, April 16, 2016)
- ["Should female athletes sue the networks for equal coverage?"](#) (*The Guardian*, September 14, 2018)
- [The Simple Truth about the Gender Pay Gap](#) Report (AAUW)
- ["Women's soccer players sue U.S. federation for gender discrimination"](#) (*The Washington Post*, March 8, 2019)
- [Women's Sports Foundation](#)
- ["Federal Judge Dismisses U.S. Women's Soccer Team's Equal Pay Claim"](#) (NPR, May 2, 2020)
- ["USWNT lawsuit versus U.S. Soccer explained: Defining the pay gaps, what's at stake for both sides"](#) (ESPN, June 3, 2020)
- ["U.S. Women's Players and U.S. Soccer Settle Equal Pay Lawsuit"](#) (*The New York Times*, February 22, 2022)
- ["The U.S. National Women's Soccer Team Wins \\$24 Million in Equal Pay Settlement"](#) (NPR, February 22, 2022)

Common Core Standards

CONTENT AREA/STANDARD
Reading
R1: Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.
Speaking and Listening
SL1: Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.
Language
L4: Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases by using context clues, analyzing meaningful word parts, and consulting general and specialized reference materials, as appropriate.
L6: Acquire and use accurately a range of general academic and domain-specific words and phrases sufficient for reading, writing, speaking, and listening at the college and career readiness level; demonstrate independence in gathering vocabulary knowledge when encountering an unknown term important to comprehension or expression.

CASEL'S SEL Competencies

COMPETENCIES
Relationship Skills: The abilities to establish and maintain healthy and supportive relationships and to effectively navigate settings with diverse individuals and groups.
Responsible Decision-Making: The abilities to make caring and constructive choices about personal behavior and social interactions across diverse situations.
Self-Awareness: The abilities to understand one's own emotions, thoughts, and values and how they influence behavior across contexts.
Social Awareness: The abilities to understand the perspectives of and empathize with others, including those from diverse backgrounds, cultures, & contexts.

Women and Sports Quiz and Answer Key

Note: All of the data supporting these explanations can be found in articles listed in the “Additional Reading and Resources” section of this lesson plan.

1. **Since the early 2000’s, the U.S. has had laws that ban discrimination based on gender in education programs. (False)**

Explanation: In 1972, a law called Title IX was passed, which banned discrimination based on sex in all education programs that receive federal funding. One of the most important impacts of the law was the rise of female athletes. For example, before Title IX, one in 27 girls played varsity high school sports. Today, about 2 in 5 play sports. The year before Title IX was enacted, there were about 310,000 girls and women in the U.S. playing high school and college sports; today, there are over 3 million.

2. **While women make up more than half of all college undergraduate students, they still don’t get an equal portion of athletic opportunities. (True)**

Explanation: Colleges spend proportionally less money on female athletes compared to male athletes. For example, in 2010 at NCAA Division I schools, women comprised almost 53% of the student body but made up less than 46% of the schools’ student athletes. Women’s teams received about 41% of the money spent on head coach salaries, 36% of recruitment funding and just 39% of overall athletic expenses.

3. **There has been an increase in female college coaches since Title IX was passed in 1972. (False)**

Explanation: While women coached more than 90% of women’s teams in 1972, today that number has dropped to between 41 and 43%. The percentage of men’s teams coached by women has continued to remain steady at between 3 and 5%.

4. **Men’s sports have declined due to Title IX. (False)**

Explanation: Opportunities for men in sports—measured by numbers of teams as well as athletes—have continued to expand since the passage of Title IX. Between the 1988–1989 and the 2010–2011 school years, NCAA member institutions have had a net gain of nearly 1,000 men’s teams.

5. **Media coverage of women’s sports has declined over the last years. (True and False)**

Explanation: A 20-year study of sports coverage revealed that women’s sports receive dramatically less coverage compared to men’s sports on network news and ESPN. In 2009, women’s sports got only 1.6% of the coverage, which represents a decrease from 6.3% in 2004. In a 2013 study, even though 40% of all athletes are women, they receive 2-4% of all media coverage. However, there has been an increase in recent years. An October 2023 study conducted by The Collective, Wasserman’s women-focused practice, found that women’s sports now comprise 15% of total sports media coverage, thanks in large part to the growth of streaming and social media.

6. **There is a “gender wage gap” (a gap between what men and women are paid) in all professions. (True)**

Explanation: The current gender wage gap is 83%, which means that women earn 83% of what men earn for comparable work. For women of color, the wage gap is even worse: 64% for African American women; 52% for Native American and 51% for Latina women.



Citing Gender Discrimination, U.S. Women's Soccer Team Files Lawsuit

By Washington Post, adapted by Newsela staff on 03.14.19

Reprinted with permission from <https://newsela.com/read/womens-soccer-gender-discrimination/id/50195/>.

Word Count **903**

Level **1050L**



Image 1. Players (from left) Alex Morgan, Christen Press, Tobin Heath and Rose Lavelle of the U.S. women's soccer team celebrate a goal during a friendly match with Spain at Rico Perez Stadium in Alicante, Spain, January 22, 2019. Photo by: Jose Breton/NurPhoto/Getty Images

Months before the U.S. women's national soccer team defends its World Cup title, team members filed a gender discrimination lawsuit against U.S. Soccer on March 8. They accuse the national organization of paying women lower salaries. The lawsuit also says the women have had to play in more dangerous conditions than men.

The lawsuit continues a years-long battle between the women's team and U.S. Soccer. Women players have grown in popularity while winning three World Cups. The women's team is fighting over their pay and treatment compared to the men's team, which has accomplished far less. The men have never won a World Cup and failed to qualify in the 2018 World Cup.

Equal Pay For Women In U.S. Soccer?

U.S. soccer is based in Chicago, Illinois. It's the governing organization that oversees both the men's and women's national teams and the training system for younger players.

In the lawsuit, filed on International Women's Day in U.S. District Court in Los Angeles, California, the women's team members say U.S. Soccer has "utterly failed to promote gender equality." They say organization officials have "gone so far as to claim that 'market realities are such that the women do not deserve to be paid equally to the men.'"

According to the lawsuit, a pay comparison shows that if each team played 20 games a year, men could earn an average of \$263,320 each. Meanwhile, women players could earn a maximum of \$99,000.

In 2016, five members of the U.S. women's team made official complaints about wage discrimination with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. This U.S. government agency handles workplace discrimination. U.S. Soccer declined to comment on the March 8 lawsuit.

The lawsuit is on behalf of 28 current women's players. It seeks class-action status, which means it would allow former players dating back to 2015, to join.

"We feel a responsibility not only to stand up for what we know we deserve as athletes, but also for what we know is right — on behalf of our teammates, future teammates, fellow women athletes, and women all around the world," said U.S. player Megan Rapinoe.

"Each of us is extremely proud to wear the United States jersey, and we also take seriously the responsibility that comes with that," said U.S. player Alex Morgan. "We believe that fighting for gender equality in sports is a part of that responsibility."

Men's Team Pales In Comparison To Women's Team Success

The U.S. is the most successful team in women's soccer history. It has won four Olympic gold medals along with the three World Cups. The team has famous stars and historic moments, including Brandi Chastain's penalty-kick goal to win the 1999 World Cup on U.S. soil.

The dispute with U.S. Soccer mirrors the issues causing a near-strike by the U.S. women's hockey team over unfair treatment based on gender that was avoided weeks before the 2017 world championships. It also comes as women's basketball and tennis players fight for fair pay.

In the lawsuit, the women's team members accuse U.S. Soccer officials of a pay system that rewards men better, despite an obvious difference in the women's team's competitive and commercial success.

Comparing total earnings and pay between the men's and women's teams is difficult. Neither U.S. Soccer nor the players' union, which provides legal representation for the women, has made information allowing direct comparisons in earnings and pay available.

In the lawsuit, the women claim that, in 2016, U.S. Soccer made more than \$17 million unexpectedly thanks largely to the women's team. Still, U.S. soccer paid the women significantly less than the men.

The lawsuit also highlights the differences in World Cup bonuses. After the 2014 World Cup, U.S. Soccer paid \$5.375 million in bonuses to the men's team, which lost in the round of 16. In 2015, the lawsuit states, U.S. Soccer paid \$1.725 million in bonuses to the women, who won the World Cup.

However, the World Cup team total bonus money is controlled by FIFA, the world's governing organization for soccer. There's a massive difference between the bonus money partly because the men's World Cup earns more money overall. The 32 men's teams split \$400 million in bonus money. The 24 women's teams split \$30 million.



Striding Toward Fairness?

The U.S. women's team plays under a group contract negotiated in 2016. During those negotiations, according to the lawsuit, the union for the women suggested a revenue-sharing system. With that system, women's pay would rise and fall in connection with the team's earnings.

"This showed the players' willingness to share in the risk and reward of the economic success of the [national team]," the lawsuit states. U.S. Soccer rejected the proposal, according to the lawsuit.

In response to criticism, U.S. Soccer has made strides on gender fairness. In 2017, the organization listed four women's players among U.S. Soccer's highest-paid employees, each making more than \$240,000. Men appear on that list only after collecting World Cup bonuses.

Differences remain in other areas, too, according to the lawsuit. From 2014 to 2017, the women played 13 times on turf, a fake grass that provides less cushion than real grass. Players believe it's more likely to cause injuries. The men played on turf just once.

Reprinted with permission from "Citing Gender Discrimination, U.S. Women's Soccer Team Files Lawsuit," Newsela, March, 14, 2019, <https://newsela.com/read/womens-soccer-gender-discrimination/id/50195/>.

