

Theresa Moore, (producer). License to Thrive: Title IX at 35.

New York: Women Make Movies, 2008 (DVD)

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This independently made film ambitiously undertakes a panoramic exploration of Title IX's impact on American society. In explaining why it was important to make this film, Harvard educated executive producer Theresa Moore said,

We want young women to get a sense of empowerment and understanding in that there are so many opportunities out there that they should capitalize on, whether it is on the athletic field or in the classroom. They should seize these opportunities and run with them because they are the next generation of leaders of our world (Moore).

Measured by Moore's expressed aspirations, License to Thrive succeeds in large measure by offering visual testament to the ascension of women into positions of influence throughout American society since the passage of Title IX in 1972. Discussions regarding the transformative power of Title IX are framed within montages of girls and women competing on the athletic field, managing major corporations, working in media both in front of and behind the camera, conducting lab experiments, and running for high political office.

After a brief introduction, the film begins with a segment entitled "Too Strong For A Woman", which allows the story of Title IX to be told by such pivotal figures as Dr. Bernice Sandler, considered to be the "godmother of Title IX", former U.S. Senator Birch Bayh (D-IN), who helped shepherd Title IX through to passage, and Gwendolyn Mink, daughter of Patsy Takemoto Mink, the first woman of color elected to the U.S. Congress for whom the legislation is now named. Through this segment and the one to follow, which deals with the complexities of separate but equal, a window into the depths of sex discrimination that once routinely affected girls and women in the

educational system is opened, revealing the blatant nature of hiring practices that simply ignored women as serious candidates for the professoriate, the limitations placed on the number of women who could attend colleges and universities of their choice because of gender quotas and then dictated what courses women could take once admitted, and the lack of support and resources available to women's sports. Later in the film, a segment on the "Men of Title IX" reinforces the critical role that men have played as allies in the implementation of Title IX in schools as well as day to day, in every family where fathers take up the obligations and joys of supporting their daughters.

Artfully, the film serves as a primer for teaching girls and women the nature of both personal and political power with educational access being the bridge to future career opportunities and success. In the segment, "Strong, Smart, and Bold", several national programs are highlighted such as "Girls in the Directors Chair", which offers young women the chance to create their own film projects; The White House Project that lends support to female political candidates; and Girls Inc.'s Eureka Project that fosters the involvement of girls in science, math, technology, and sports.

Perhaps one of the most novel aspects of this film occurs in the fourth segment, which greets viewers with the song immortalized by the iconic Aretha Franklin and reintroduced to a later generation by Annie Lennox of the Eurythmics, the song being "Sisters Are Doing It For Themselves". It is here that a cultural response to the long-standing assertion that the efforts of male athletes pay not only for their own experience but that of female athletes as well is upended, at least momentarily. In a rare media moment, the financial commitment women have to college and university athletic programs unfolds in the story of the creation of Yale University's endowment for women's athletics, a fund started by nine former female athletes who had graduated from the university in the 1970s, now referred to simply as the WISER (Women's Intercollegiate Sports Endowment & Resource) Fund.

The noble effort and high purpose of this film to capture the broad social impact of Title IX recommends that it be viewed widely. At the same time, there are some modest flaws in the film that warrant mention. First, because the film is designed to be used in the classroom, as evidenced by the discussion guide marketed to educators, which has options available for students in Grades 3-5,

Grades 6-8, and Grades 9-12 (License to Thrive Team, 2008), the explanation of Title IX's 3-prong test reverses the order of prong 1 and prong 3 and further erroneously implies that compliance can be achieved by satisfying one of those prongs alone. Second, and far more complicated, is the lack of a distinction between the scope of Title IX, which is intended to allow all students the opportunity to fulfill their promise and potential in America's schools uninhibited by discriminatory barriers grounded in sex stereotypes, and the impact that Title IX has as a result of fostering educational access for female students.

Third, the film's strength is at some level also a weakness: in an attempt to demonstrate how social change prompted by legislation ultimately resonates throughout the entire society, the specific work of educating citizens about how Title IX works and what steps individuals can take to remedy sex discrimination in schools goes unaddressed. Fourth, where the depiction of Title IX as being understood primarily as a "sports law" in the film is designed to aid in broadening the dialogue and discussion, nevertheless the visual impact of the film is anchored in action shots of female athletes. In a film of less than an hour, it would be difficult to achieve an ideal balance between educating viewers about the full scale and scope of Title IX but there is a hint that the filmmakers themselves had not resolved that issue themselves. In point of fact, despite the message, this visual skewing may have been intentional so as to make the film more marketable to its distributor, ESPN2, which aired the piece just at the start of the NCAA Women's Final Four in 2008 through June of that same year. Although this may be far too much to put on the filmmakers, in the end, the remaining question (that is never alluded to) is why, with all of the progress made, Title IX remains such a controversial issue in athletics.

In conclusion, *License to Thrive* offers an important contribution to the resources available to preserve and perpetuate the story of Title IX. Its positive message of empowerment for girls and women emanates throughout. At the same time, scholars and educators should be aware of the few areas of confusion that might arise for students who will likely have no base of understanding to put in context what they may be seeing. Further, for those seeking a more definitive piece that specifically addresses the impact of Title IX in athletics, a comprehensive and meticulously developed DVD collection entitled *Title IX: Implications for Women in Sport and Education* is highly recommended (Parks).

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