Many doors of opportunity in educational endeavors opened for women following the passage of Title IX. In 1971, the year before the enactment of the law, women earned only one percent of dental degrees, nine percent of medical degrees and seven percent of law degrees. By 2000 the number of women completing these professional programs grew to 40 percent of dental degrees, 43 percent of medical degrees, 46 percent of law degrees. Moreover, 44 percent of doctoral degrees went to women in the year 2000, up from 14 percent in 1971 (Digest of Education Statistics, 2001). Yet these impressive educational gains for women have not been the focus of public attention regarding Title IX. Rather, the impact of Title IX on scholastic athletics has dominated public discourse since the passage of the law. More specifically, women’s success in education has met with a conservative backlash focusing on Title IX and the division of resources within collegiate athletics.

Whereas Title IX became law thirty years ago, the issue of Title IX compliance in athletics remains as hotly contested today as it was in 1972. Most recently, the debate has been framed as an either/or division of resources between men’s ‘minor’ sports and women’s athletics with Title IX as the crux of the argument. According to those who view Title IX as a threat to men’s minor sports, the rise in participation numbers in women’s sport not only correlates to a decrease in men’s ‘minor’ sport participation numbers, but is also the cause of that decrease. In response, women’s sport advocates argue that the rela-
tionship between men’s minor sport and women’s sport is a spurious one with the confounding factor being the development of a big business sport model within collegiate programs. This model is reflected in the escalating costs of men’s football and basketball along with an ‘arms’ race for bigger and more elaborate facilities. The skewed spending within athletic departments has not only contributed to decreases in opportunities in men’s minor sport, but is also the reason that women continue to receive less than their full share of the athletic pie. In relation to wrestling, the issue of Title IX has become more complicated in the last decade, as women’s grappling participation has grown.

The focus of this paper is a critical analysis of publicly mediated debates over the issues surrounding Title IX and athletics with an attempt to understand the cultural climate and the far-reaching consequences for women. In this analysis, I examine public discourse surrounding Title IX and wrestling from 1972 through 2002. Sources include daily newspapers, Sports Illustrated, wrestling periodicals, and The Chronicle of Higher Education. Using a critical cultural studies approach, I read media representations with an eye to deconstructing underlying intersecting lines of power relationships within the broader social context. These mediated debates carry significance far beyond determining allocations of resources between men and women within athletic departments. Ultimately the results and tone of the debate have the potential to bring changes to the law that will carry far-reaching effects for gender relations starting with education and extending into the professional realms women have accessed through increased opportunities in education.

While mediated debates over Title IX may not dictate what people think, they do have the power to determine what they think about. “To put it simply: the mass media have become core systems for the distribution of ideology” (Gitlin, 1980, p. 2). The processed image, Title IX in this case, becomes “the thing” for a public that has few alternative sources of information, or none at all, for a perspective outside mainstream media. “The media - at least in liberal capitalist society - take account of certain popular currents and pressures, symbolically