

## NIL-lionaire

With the legalization of college athletes being able to earn money based on their name, image, and likeness, commonly called 'NIL,' an age-old concern has surged back to the forefront of college athletics: the sexualization of female athletes for profit. Olivia Dunne, a gymnast at Louisiana State University, has been at the center of much of this controversy. Dunne, through NIL and her 8.3 million social media followers, is estimated to be the top earner among female athletes, earning somewhere over 2 million dollars as a student-athlete, a feat unimaginable in collegiate gymnastics just a few years prior.

The controversy surrounding Dunne has not come from her NIL earnings but, rather, how she grew her following on social media. Many people credited her social media following to her femininity rather than her skills as a gymnast. People accused Dunne of posting suggestive, flirty videos, known as "thirst traps" in order to become as popular as she has. Stanford Women's Basketball Coach Tara VanDerveer spoke to the New York Times to call out NIL as regressive for female athletes. VanDerveer's concern, along with many others, is that NIL is not empowering female athletes but, instead, is upholding sexism in athletics.

Dunne and her supporters argue that what high-earning female athletes have been able to achieve has empowered young women across the nation to be able to pursue their dreams of going to college and being able to succeed and earn substantial money off of their careers as athletes. Where many male athletes have the ability to go professional in their respective sports, that option isn't available for many female athletes. NIL has somewhat closed the gap, providing female athletes opportunities to make more of their time as a student-athlete.

Advocates argue that NIL not only empowers female athletes but that the concerns about young women posting suggestive videos are unfounded. According to Dunne herself, being flirty and showing off her body in ways that emphasize traditional notions of female beauty on social media is empowering to both her and other young women. After all, it is her body, and Dunne has the ability to dictate how much she shows on social media.

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What obligations do female athletes have as role models to young women when considering NIL opportunities?
2. What should sponsors consider when paying a female athlete to endorse their products?
3. How should women receiving NIL earnings think about traditional beauty standards, if at all?

