

cause a rupture in cultural values” that currently assume females to be inferior.

Finally, Chapter 13 is disappointing because it neither focuses on the media, nor serves as a springboard for future research. P.S. Highlen’s analysis of the “co-essence” model offers an athlete-centred challenge to mainstream sport; however, this model appears to be steeped in an essentialist position that assumes a co-essence (a transcendental soul) can be achieved. This contradicts the book’s focus on how sport and media images are socially constructed expressions of gender values. Granted, sporting activities serve as the raw material for media, and therefore suggestions about how to change sport are warranted, but the collection ends without a comprehensive evaluation of media research presented in the text.

Overall, the book is written in an accessible manner and it provides feminist and media communities with a valuable resource to open up a hybrid field of feminist sportmedia studies.

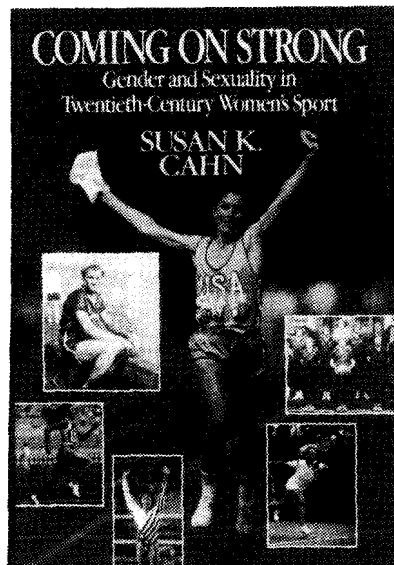
## COMING ON STRONG: GENDER AND SEXUALITY IN TWENTIETH-CENTURY WOMEN’S SPORT

Susan K. Cahn. New York: The Free Press, 1994.

by *Christina Batty*

Many women participating in sport today are unaware that their presence in the sporting arena has been granted to them, not because it is their right to participate, but because women athletes of previous decades have

struggled long and hard against the exclusion of women from sport. Many have not considered or challenged the ideology that sport is a male domain. In *Coming on Strong: Gender and Sexuality in Twentieth-Century Women’s Sport*, Susan Cahn studies how gender and sexuality have been culturally constructed through the twentieth century in the United States and how these issues have been used to prevent women’s inclusion in sport. Her study



is carried out by examining how educators, athletes, officials, promoters and journalists have influenced and affected women’s development in sport.

Her study illustrates that cultural definitions of masculinity and femininity have been reinforced through sport. Women’s participation in sporting activities challenged the existing social order of men and women. Throughout the century various theories were developed by the medical establishment and educational institutions—ranging from the vitalist theory to the idea that sport promoted lesbianism—to prevent women from becoming too involved. Certain sports became “feminized” and athletic events were turned into beauty contests to detract from the competitive nature of the event. The female athlete, unlike the male athlete, was judged on her appearance and not her skill. It was believed that competitive sport created hysteria in women, therefore par-

ticipation was only acceptable when it was done at a moderate level to promote beauty, health and an improved ability to be a good wife and mother.

Cahn’s study also examines how male coaches and promoters as well as the media appropriated women’s sport in an attempt to control it and perpetuate ideas about women’s inferior ability and strength. Coaches and officials altered rules and created a woman’s version of games such as basketball and baseball. Boundary lines were shortened and playing time was reduced to create a game which took up less time and space. Promoters appropriated sport in an effort to make money and maintain the femininity of the female sporting population. Cahn shows how the media played a very important role in distinguishing between the acceptable and the unacceptable female athlete. Rarely was her acceptance dependent on her skill but rather her ability to remain feminine and graceful. Because athletic involvement represented masculine power, it therefore also represented failed femininity, but to the women athlete it provided an opportunity to combine traditional “masculine” qualities of strength with conventional “feminine” attributes of nurturance.

The way in which gender, class and race were connected to define what activities were acceptable for women is also examined. Upper class women often remained outside the stream of criticism and were permitted to enjoy activities such as equestrian riding, golf and tennis. Lower and working class athletes participated primarily in baseball and basketball and faced a constant barrage of criticism for their “mannish” demeanor. African American athletes faced a deeply entrenched racial bias as well as the gender bias. Their success in track and field was often dismissed due to the belief that they possessed a “natural” masculine ability.

The assumption that “mannish” athleticism was connected to lesbianism created a homosexual stigma

that surrounded women's sport. Lesbian athletes were forced to cope with some of the cruelest criticism. Critics of women participating in sport asserted that sport induced "mannish" behavior which "disqualified the female athlete as a candidate for heterosexual romance." But while lesbians in sport faced criticism from the outside world they also found a safe place where they were accepted within the women's sporting community. Cahn claims that lesbian athletes used the space provided in sport to create a "shared culture and affirmative identity."

*Coming on Strong: Gender and Sexuality in Twentieth-Century Women's Sport* is not a comprehensive study of women's athletics. It disappointingly focuses on specific sports only; however it does successfully show the connection between ideas regarding women's sexuality and their subsequent exclusion from sport.

Throughout the century women in sport have been excluded from the athletic community and have often been marginalized within the feminist community. This book helps to reinforce that sport has the ability to help equalize relations between the sexes and that the sociological study of women in sport provides an important contribution to the full understanding of women's oppression in the twentieth century.

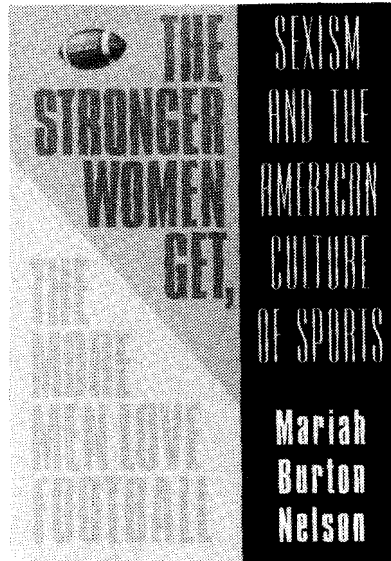
## THE STRONGER WOMEN GET, THE MORE MEN LOVE FOOTBALL

Mariah Burton Nelson. New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1994.

by Helen Jefferson Lenskyj

The provocative title of this hard-hitting book is in fact its central thesis. Mariah Burton Nelson proposes that football represents, for the majority of American men, a last bastion

of patriarchy in a fast changing world. Men on the football field—already bigger than most men, and bigger than real life when they are suited up for The Game—symbolize what it means to be a real man in a society where most other definitions of maleness are facing an onslaught of challenges from women in general, and feminists in particular. In Nelson's own experience, when all else fails, men who resent her feminist views—



other sports journalists or simply the "man in the street"—comfort themselves with the statement that "women will never play in the NFL." Somehow, the fact that there is still one remaining tree house sporting the sign "No girls allowed" bolsters fragile masculine identities.

Nelson's book could be subtitled "The Slime That Men Do." After setting the stage by reviewing historical and contemporary trends in American sport, particularly on college campuses, Nelson focuses on three key male violence issues: sexual assault committed by male athletes, harassment and molestation of girls and women by their male coaches (including her own adolescent experience of this kind of abuse), and harassment of female sportswriters by male athletes. In all three areas there is virtually an epidemic of male violence, largely unchecked by the usual harassment policies, professional codes of behaviour, and em-

ployment laws that provide some measure of control in other social contexts. The book represents a first in terms of putting all this information together and therefore its impact is extremely powerful.

In the discussion of sexual assault, Nelson focuses on the gang rape of a female student by three members of a college basketball team—an all too common occurrence on American university campuses. Female readers probably do not need to know the graphic and horrendous details of this and other gang rapes committed by student athletes—a well-known example being the Glen Ridge case where a retarded girl was raped by four high school football players. However, since the book is intended for a very broad audience—and would obviously do the most good if it were required reading for all those men "who love football"—the graphic and brutal details of the gang rapes are probably necessary. Equally important, Nelson cites a variety of research studies showing that college athletes are over-represented as perpetrators of sexual assault, with fraternities and sports teams representing the most likely groups of men on campus to commit gang rapes. It appears that celebrations of masculinity and male bonding are facilitated by the creation of negative reference groups, with women and gay men serving as the key "others" for male athletes.

As an outspoken critic of mainstream sport—the author of two books and numerous articles on the subject—Nelson has been subjected to the predictable barrage of epithets, including manhating and lesbianism. In all her writing, she has directly confronted the problems of homophobia and lesbophobia in sport, providing cogent analyses of the ways in which sport serves to create a certain kind of approved heterosexual femininity that serves to perpetuate existing gender relations. She is equally strong on the issue of homophobia and the fairly obvious homoerotic subtexts in men's traditional contact sports, balanced by the unequivocally sexist and heterosexist