



Coming on Strong: Gender and Sexuality in Twentieth-Century Women's Sports

Susan K. Cahn

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Today, there are women athletes who are media celebrities and a source of inspiration for many. But not long ago, being serious about sport was considered appropriate only for men and boys. Throughout the twentieth century, women's increasing participation in sport has challenged our conception of womanhood. Some celebrated the female athlete as the embodiment of modern womanhood, but others branded her "mannish" or lesbian. Ultimately, she altered the perception of sport as an exclusively male domain.

Susan Cahn's story of how sport has changed women's lives and women have transformed sport is an important chapter in the wider history of women's struggles to define their role in the twentieth century. For the women who dared to compete, participation in sport enabled them to expand the boundaries of women's activities and to claim that strength, skill, physicality, and competitiveness could be authentic attributes of womanhood. This is the legacy they passed on to the new generation of women for whom athleticism is becoming a way of life.

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