

# Women and homophobia in sports media essay



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“ Violence and Sport” a book written by Michael Smith was an excellent reading that portrayed many different aspects on sports. It will allow the reader to see how violent sports have gotten over time as well as other mainstream issues that occur on not just in the United States but as well as on a global level. It is also noted how violence is perceived as a serious social problem and that there is no doubt that the levels of violence has risen over the past couple of decades and how race, women, and homophobia has played a role in world of sports. This is an ongoing issue even today in the modern age and it will take a considerable amount of time and effort to correct the problems that we are facing in sports dealing with race, women, and homophobia in competitive sports.

It was stated by John Walsh, Senior Vice President and Executive Editor of the sports cable network ESPN claims, “ Sports have moved from being a subculture to becoming a major force in America’s social and cultural landscape.” (CNN, 2010) Society demonstrates to be sympathetic to inviting sports into their culture. The passion over sports issues can rival the intensity of political debates. According to the U. S. News poll on CNN, this mindset constitutes about a third of the adult population and is mainly comprised of a population who inquire that they play sports at least a couple of times a week or the ones who watch sports matches on television, several times during the week (Banks, 2009). Society’s participation in sports involves issues and biases dealing with the minority groups such as; gender, ethnicity and homosexuality. Society’s labels and limitations in the sport world are slowly starting to liquefy. The athletic continuum is starting to become a popular way for society to express its cultural diversity, awareness

and acceptance allowing people to experience a feeling of heimat. According to Banks, “ the idiom of sports is the way that many Americans and countries feel most engaged and comfortable, talking about racial issues, standards of excellence, comparative worth, even right and wrong.” (Banks, 2009)

Many countries are moving forward in their positive thinking of sports. The Olympics was once noted as the “ war of nations” and how it was a sense of belonging to that person

representing their particular country. In this day in age it still is. For example when Jusain Bolt won the 100 and 200 and broke the record for both. Many Americans were tied to that record because it was set by an American and now we no longer hold the record the Jamaicans do and is believed to hold for years to come. However, now people enjoy admiring and applauding individual talent regardless of the athlete’s origin, yet still maintaining that feeling of heimat. Athletics has become a major beneficial and influential power towards any nation’s society as a whole. The Bozell poll survey, which is conducted by CNN that obtains peoples opinion, states, that Americans think spectator sports have a positive impact on society and that competitive sports help children to learn valuable life lessons that they will carry with them through their adult life. The poll also reveals that it is a possibility that the lessons of sports provide a positive outlook in other life’s issues. It is strongly believed with ninety one percent consider participation in sports help people broaden their mind in dealing with those from different racial or ethnic background; seventy-seven percent agree that sports help people to become better parents, and sixty eight percent believe that sports could

help people get along better with people of who is of the opposite genders.

(Bozell Poll Survey, 2004)

The involvement in women's sports is rapidly growing across the globe. During the time of 1971-72 roughly thirty thousand women were participating in college sports and by 1994-95 their participation rate sky rocketed to over 110, 000. In high school the involvement levels rose from 300, 000 to more than 2 million. (Hoberman, 1999) Important historical events in history have thrust women into the world of sports. Upon performing more research it is noted, dating back to the 1800's the first known women's golf tournament is held at the Mussleburgh Golf Club in Scotland among the women who were local fishwives, the first intercollegiate women's tennis club started in 1881 at Smith College, and around 1896 a woman living in Athens ran the marathon. During the 1900's women were starting to perform in the Olympics in Paris and slowly started to diffuse into other countries allowing more participation from women. The All American Girls Professional Baseball League was formed during the mid 1900's, a sex chromatin test for women athletes was introduced as a prerequisite for Olympic competition, the Association for Intercollegiate Athletics for Women was organized to enforce sport opportunities for college women, forcing the NCAA to allow women participants in college and soon after Title IX is imposed. (Smith, 2001) Title IX is a huge force towards the positive cultural movement for women in sports in America. Title IX was passed in 1972 and allowed provided guaranteed equal access and opportunity for women in throughout all college sports. Recruiting, scholarships and athletic benefits were made

widely available. The new law helped to view the seriousness of the female athletes and helped to destroy the outdated views of women in sports.

Diversity and sensitivity training is starting to become a major focus in high schools, universities and corporations throughout the world. (Smith, 2001) Several workshops and seminars strive to educate, dispel and aid in rebuild the institutions' ideas on gender equality. Huge strides by the male gender are being made to exercise the appreciate women's roles in sports. An example is the men's wrestling and rugby teams at Northeastern University organize an annual breakfast in honor of National Girls and Women in Sports Day still today. The Women's Sports Foundation is one of many different organizations striving for gender equality in sports across the nation and globe. Their main goal is " To Promote the lifelong participation of all girls and women in sports and fitness, and to create an educated public that encourages female's participation and supports gender equality." (King, 2008) Not only are support groups and foundations fighting for the rights of women in sports but the media is also attempting to support the growth of female athletes in both college and professional sports. However this is not the only emerging problem within the sport world. Many people have a weird fear and discrimination of people who are homosexual or different than them.

Homophobia is emerging as a huge issue in women's sports and not so much in men's. Although society to a certain extent has become slightly more accepting of homosexuality in general, some women are somewhat intimidated from sport by fear of being classified as a lesbian. (Smith, 2001) Homophobia is real life issue but serious positive ways of thinking are being

made. Gay rights activists and other supportive groups such as Gay, Lesbian BGLAD, have joined alliances to help fight the discrimination of homosexuals involved in sports. Gay magazines, newspapers, books and websites help everyone in the society to understand and respect all individuals regardless of sexual preference and are being diffused into different cultures across the world. Because of this many people are being educated of the different rights that homosexuality has and that they are no different from someone who is heterosexual. Some major steps are being taken such as by the man named Eric “ Gumby” Anderson; the first openly gay high school track coach in America has noted his long struggle to bridge the huge gap between sports and being gay. Even though Eric’s gayness was highly criticized with strong opposition he believed that he had something to attest to the world dealing with gay coaches or even gay athletes. Anderson would like to make an impact on high school athletes anywhere and everywhere. Another act of revealing their true identity and who they are is an article “ Coming Out” “ Part 1 and Part 2” about a high school, varsity captain football player coming out to the community. Corey Johnson from Massachusetts did not want to hide his secret any longer from all of his family and friends. However some community members expressed their detestation towards him, the majority of the community accepted him with open arms and little hostility. Corey’s teammates were amenable to the situation and Corey continued to be the co-captain of the football team and become a massive icon in the gay activist community. Corey Johnson’s announcement was seen as a “ visionary act.” Corey’s situation is a great moment for society and could possibly perhaps help to prove to be another positive cultural influence through sports. With Corey and Coach Anderson coming out openly to the

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public this is believed to prove to be a step in a positive direction. This will help with gay, lesbian, and bisexuals everywhere. Women and homosexuals are just two groups of minorities in sports. Children and adults of color and poor socio-economic communities have historically been rejected from the world of athletics. (Smith, 2001) Many different organizations and support groups have been formed to cultivate minority participation in sports.

Noted by Michael Smith, Inner City Handball Associates helps children of low economic backgrounds and different ethnicities to become involved in sport. Their mission is; “ To give every child the opportunity to explore their full potential and develop an academically disciplined mind and a strong health body. To help nurture a strong sense of pride and motivate our youth to be the best at whatever they choose to be. While also encouraging the youth to volunteer, to help rebuild and strengthen their communities creating their own positive role models for future generations to follow.” In the past decades minorities have been place in somewhat of a caste system. The black athletes were always the football players or the basketball players and the sports like golf and tennis were for whites’ majority of the time. (Smith, 2001) Minorities’ absence in sports has drawn the attention of Former President Clinton. In the article, “ Clinton Needles Sports World for Not Hiring Minorities”, he addressed the fact the minorities are not being hired as coaches and administrators in college and in professional sports. He also stated, “ I’ve hired hundreds and hundreds of minorities as governor the governor of Arkansas and as presidents of different organizations, Clinton said. Nobody ever accused me of giving jobs to people that weren’t qualified.” (Constantine, 1997).

Advancements for the inclusion of minorities in sports have been noted since then. Major improvements have occurred since then. Some of these examples are an increase in college and professional football coaches as well as basketball, administration positions have been earned by many minority educators, and even now an African American president. When one observes the sport world in the European countries it has changed quite significantly during the past few decades. It use to be that blacks were not allowed to participate with whites in rugby and other sports so they were forced to create their own leagues but were allowed to play against the stronger white leagues. (Goldstein, 1983) However now this is not the case major changes were made and are not like this anymore. Also noted by Clinton is by saying, “ it is obvious that athletics are leading America towards a better, more harmonious society,” and that he hoped that those involved in sports would also learn “ good life skills and to make good decisions. It’s important that the lessons they learn carry over to good citizenship, including attitudes about people of different races.” (Constantine, 1997)

Michael Smith provides some detailing information on minorities entering the NASCAR field that is predominately still white. He highlights the struggle for minorities to break into the stereotypically white world of racecar driving.

Wendell Scott became the one and only African American to win the NASCAR in 1963, afterwards no other African American could follow

behind him in his footsteps. Now African Americans are slowly being turned onto NASCAR not only as fans but also as racers at times. However African Americans still have yet to become drawn in as a major force to perform among the high level of NASCAR. “ Though racial inequality exists, NASCAR



is pushing for a more positive cultural acceptance of diversity in the society of sports.” Well we hope the racial climate reflects America. That’s what we want the sport to reflect. I mean we feel this is possible the most American professional sport there is” stated Richard Petty. He also stated that, “ Whether they are red white or purple they’re welcome to try just like anyone else.” At one point in time there were two black race car owners, basketball great Julius Erving and former Redskins running back Joe Washington have spent a few unsuccessful years in the Busch Series, but do not blame racism. (Smith, 2001)

NASCAR and most athletic organizations admit willingly that racial equality has not yet been achieved in the society of sports. Optimistically the trend of diversity could possibly continue in America and make a positive cultural influence in today’s society. It is a noticeable trend that other countries athletes are becoming popular in America. This succeeds in not only diversifying sports but also including a globalization perspective to include other country’s cultural aspects of sport and helping with the issue of equality. Many organizations have been formed worldwide to open up athletic opportunities to people of all ethnicities and to serve as an exchange of culture. Society’s labels are progressively losing their footholds in the world of sports. Though it is hard to dispute that Americans and other countries have a long way to fully achieve equality in sports, accept homosexuals in sport, and different races and ethnicities, I believe that it is safe to say that a movement towards a positive cultural influence of sports in society is obvious. I believe that the book “ Violence and Sport” is a book worth reading and is

very educating in dealing with different aspects of life, different sports and different views into how people perceive sport as their sense of belonging or how sport is slowly starting to diffuse into different countries cultures including some here in America where different races are breaking ground in different sports and accepting that person for who they are and not caring of their race, gender, or sexuality.