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Susan K. Cahn. *Coming on Strong: Gender and Sexuality in Twentieth-Century Women's Sport.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994. x + 358 pp. $14.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-674-14434-7.

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When the Dutch athlete Francina Blankers-Koen won four gold medals in track and field at the 1948 Olympic Games, one London newspaper deemed it relevant to inform its readers that the "Fastest Woman in the World Is an Expert Cook." The headline illustrates the ambivalence modern Western societies have shown toward women's participation in what has been construed as an "inherently" masculine activity–sports.

Focusing on the United States primarily in the decades between 1920 and 1960, Susan Cahn's book examines the varying ways physical educators, leaders of athletic organizations, commercial sports promoters, popular media, and female athletes themselves tried to reconcile femininity with the apparently "masculinizing" qualities of sport. Using a wide array of popular and trade publications, organizational records, and interviews, Cahn traces images of and debates about women in sports. She argues that at the beginning of the century, the debate centered on the potential for sports to impair women's reproductive capacity and to unleash women's sexuality. In the 1920s and '30s, the debate shifted to fears that sports made women "mannish" and unattractive, leading by the 1950s to the view that "mannish" athleticism was linked to lesbianism.

Cahn chronicles, in often fascinating detail, the arguments and strategies used by different groups to mitigate the cultural dissonance between femininity and women's participation in sports. Female physical educators attempted to create a separate and "moderate" sphere for women's athletics, replacing competition with "play days" and creating a restrictive set of rules for women's sports. Commercial sports promoters, in contrast, sought to allay fears of "unfeminine" sportswomen by emphasizing the sexual appeal of athletes, using satin uniforms, beauty contests, mandatory charm school, in addition to dress and hairstyle codes. In both cases, the aim was to show that sports could enhance women's fitness as mothers or their attractiveness as mates.

Much of this story is familiar in its outlines, but Cahn tells it more thoroughly and with greater depth than other accounts, while adding new layers of understanding. One of the book's strengths is its attention to the ways class and race intersected with gender. Cahn shows, for example, that the views of white female educators were based on middle-class conceptions of feminine respectability. Her in-depth examinations of particular sports include those that were favored by the wealthy (field hockey), the middle class (non-competitive basketball), the working class (softball), and African Americans (track and field). Her interviews with former athletes show that women gained opportunities and personal satisfaction from participation in sports, while rarely feeling stigmatized. Cahn also discusses the participation of lesbians in sport, finding that sport provided a place for lesbians to create a shared culture.

In a final chapter (appropriately titled "You've Come a Long Way, Maybe"), Cahn sketches the remarkable developments since the 1960s, deftly highlighting the rapid advances that have occurred in women's sports, while also noting the limits of these changes, such as the predominance of men in coaching and administrative positions and the regulation of women's bodies imposed by the new emphasis on fitness.

The book has several minor flaws. The writing is lively and lucid but sometimes veers into repetitiveness. The subtitle is misleadingly broad: Cahn examines only the United States, and her main findings cover only about half of the 20th century. As with many reworked doctoral dissertations, the book remains rather narrowly focused. The decision to exclude films, fiction, and art–sources rich with images of female athletes–is unfortunate. In addition, Cahn's examination of sexuality and gender is limited to women's sexuality and constructions of womanhood and femininity. After a brief discussion of the development of "manly sport" and "muscular Christianity" in the 19th century, the issue of masculinity disappears from view, leaving unanswered the question of how changing conceptions of masculinity may have af-

fected perceptions of women's sports. Finally, Cahn does not situate her research in the context of other scholarly work on women and sports, although her endnotes indicate she has consulted the relative outpouring of recent publications on the subject.

Nevertheless, Cahn amply demonstrates the importance of sports as a locus for gender definition and conflict, and she ties developments in sports to broader trends such as the expansion of consumer culture. The book is enlivened throughout with colorful quotations that buttress Cahn's compelling conclusions. Her book contains insights and implications that should be of interest to those studying popular culture, women's history, labor history, and issues of race and gender.

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