



accepted part of the everyday life of all classes of society, individual differences in erotic taste notwithstanding.

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### ATHLETICS

Athletics is the broad field of physical activity in which strength is called into play and increased. Homosexual men and women have been and are active in both mainstream and gay community athletics. Their experience in athletics is, in many respects, the same as that of their heterosexual counterparts: experiences such as physical exertion, team membership and competition.

#### *Athletics and the Male Image.*

Since the ancient Olympic Games, athletics has been considered a sign of masculinity. Women, until the twentieth century, have been excluded from athletics; they were prohibited from participation in the Sacred Games of Olympia and from the activities of the *gymnasia* of Ancient Greece. (There is evidence, however, that in ancient China, upper-class women played a version of soccer with men.) With the emancipation of Western women in the twentieth century, some became athletes. The modern Olympics prohibited the participation of women until 1928. At the 1984 Los Angeles Olympics less than a quarter of the athletes were female.

In the nineteenth century, theories of homosexuality were developed which saw it as a symptom of gender confusion; in conjunction with that, there developed a common belief that homosexual men were essentially feminine and lesbians masculine.

The nineteenth-century expansion of the British Empire and its sphere of cultural influence, the ascendancy of the bourgeoisie, the rise of the British "public school" system, and the central role that sports played in that system have made a cumulative contribution to the twentieth-century Western conception of sports. Athletics became the quintessential ex-

pression of masculine values, the values of model citizenship: aggression, competition, racism, elitism, militarism, imperialism, sexism, and heterosexism. Many writers have suggested that athletics and healthy heterosexual masculinity are popularly equated. That athletic image is dramatically unlike the dominant religious, medical, and legal models of homosexuality which categorized homosexuals as sinful, pathological, and criminal. Because the popular images of the athlete and the homosexual are virtually antithetical, model healthy citizen and degenerate pathological criminal respectively, many athletes, especially professionals, have found it difficult publicly to acknowledge their homosexual orientation. Consequently, it is difficult to know who in professional sports is homosexual. Some famous athletes are known to be homosexual, among them John Menlove Edwards (mountaineering), Billie Jean King (tennis), David Kopay (football), Martina Navratilova (tennis) and Bill Tilden (tennis).

*Lesbian and Gay Athletes.* The masculine signification of athletics, in conjunction with the popular belief that lesbians are more masculine than their heterosexual counterparts, has led to the notion that many athletic women are lesbian. It seems likely that there is a concentration of lesbians in athletics, but the factual truth of this assumption cannot be determined. Statistical research on the presence of homosexuals in athletics is inevitably flawed; fear of negative repercussions mitigates against athletes identifying themselves as homosexual. There has been a concerted effort by individual athletes, sports organizations, administrators, coaches and scholars in the history and sociology of sport to disguise the substantial participation of lesbians in sport. Many lesbian athletes have been denied participation on teams and been fired from positions as national coaches when their lesbianism became known. Research on lesbians in athletics is minimal and pro-