

Pat Griffin, *Strong Women, Deep Closets – Lesbians and Homophobia in Sport* Champaign, IL, Human Kinetics, 1998, 245 pages, US\$19.95.

Michelangelo Signorile, *Life Outside – The Signorile Report on Gay Men: Sex, Drugs, Muscles, and the Passages of Life*. New York, Harper Perennial, 1997, 325 pages, US\$13.00

Strong Women Deep Closets and *Life Outside* deal with issues confronting lesbians and gays within the context of fitness and sport. The authors, both humanist social activists for gay and lesbian people, write in a chatty and anecdotal style that will appeal to wide audiences. Both books draw on the personal experience of the authors, lesbian and gay respectively, as well as informal interviews with hundreds of other lesbian and gay sportspeople. While Griffin struggles to explain lesbianism to those involved in sport – to make administrators more tolerant, coaches more accepting, parents more understanding and lesbians more open and happy – Signorile targets his discussion at homosexual men and those close to the homosexual community. The latter makes *Life Outside* a tight work and an effective tool in meeting Signorile's objectives. Signorile is a journalist, Griffin a scholar, and the former's ability to 'speak to the people' comes across strongly. On the other hand, *Strong Women, Deep Closets* has a better case for a place on the library shelves of physical educators, given that it is sport specific. Signorile's book covers much more than sport issues.

Life Outside offers a detailed discussion of what Signorile identifies as the main concerns of the gay community in contemporary America from monogamy, promiscuity, ageing and recreational drug use to the 'cult of masculinity.' His interest in sport hinges on the alarming pressure on gay men to achieve the unrealistic physical ideals embodied by this cult. *Strong Women*, on the other hand, leads the way in an area that has received little coverage. It is one of the first books to address the concerns of lesbians in sport. Undoubtedly to fill this void, Griffin tries to cover a vast range of topics from Victorian approaches to women's health and sport to identity management, Christian evangelism and transformation in women's sport. It is a consciousness-raising manuscript, but one which loses force from its attempt to do too much, too fast. There are excellent books on the history of women's involvement in sport. Griffin should have left her discussion of general historical considerations to authors such as Susan Cahn, whom she cites extensively, and dispatched the subject in a few paragraphs, rather than devoting an entire chapter to the subject at the expense of the coherence and strength of her broader political objectives. This would have given her more space to discuss the issues of concealment and homophobia in women's sport. These are her real concerns and they could have been treated in more depth.

The theme that cements Signorile's work is one that women traditionally view as a major issue. The 'cult of masculinity,' which Signorile describes, revolves around the normalisation of an 'ideal' male body that is unattainable for most, and subjects gay men to immense pressure and self-doubt. Frantically attempting to distance themselves from the image of the effeminate fairy, the homosexual community has been, for several decades now, defining a new virile look. Tight shirts, bulging biceps, well-defined pectoral muscles and closely cropped hair now distinguish the gay male precisely *because* of their hypermasculinity. Having a sturdy

body and strong muscles is for many gay men also a way of proving that they are healthy and disease-free – no AIDS – and therefore potential sexual partners. As one New York gym advertised, 'no pets, no sex!' (p. 137).

Signorile describes the images that set the standards to which many gay men aspire as carefully constructed illusions parading as reality. The ideal gay male icon, the one who stares out from gym and fashion advertisements, in pornographic literature, and even in safe-sex campaign posters is probably air-brushed, made-up, cropped and computer enhanced. Signorile explains that 'the butts are made rounder [and] bigger, the biceps accentuated, the waists slimmed . . . to proportions that are impossible to emulate, even with drugs and surgery' (p. 69). This look, however, has locked men into an eternal battle to achieve an elusive standard. Hours at the gym don't suffice, so steroids, 'nutritional' supplements and plastic surgery are included in the formula. Even full-fledged AIDS patients may be 'cut and stacked' given the amount of steroids they consume to avoid muscle wasting, despite the horrific potential side effects of the drugs

Griffin also recognises the angst of the lesbian sportswoman who devotes extensive energy to proving she is a 'real' woman. Since sport is traditionally a male preserve, and since there is an implicit belief in the wider population that lesbians are somehow 'manly,' there is considerable pressure in female sporting subcultures for women to visually identify themselves as straight through a 'heterosexy' demeanour – make-up, short skirts and an almost mandatory pony-tail. Any deviation from this standard exposes the entire team/program to scrutiny, because of the supposed predatory nature of the lesbian. Griffin writes that the image of 'a lesbian boogeywoman [sic] haunts all women, scaring young women and their parents, discouraging solidarity among women in sport, and keeping women's sport advocates on the defensive' (p. 53). This bogey-woman stereotype is what keeps women in the closet and results in the 'unplayable lies' that Griffin divulges in depth, and could have provided the basis for a very successful book on identity management among lesbian sportswomen.

Both authors clamour for change and indeed provide an excellent catalyst for discussion and reflection. Similarly, both works are useful in making other gay and lesbian people aware of the communality of their experiences. As one man reported to Signorile, 'I am grateful to see that I am far from alone. There is a whole big gay world out there' (p. 300-301). However, for these two books to achieve their stated objectives, they needed to move beyond conscience-raising to concrete political strategy. Both authors have done this in their own ways, with varying degrees of success.

The strength of Signorile's work relates to the fact that he has identified a target audience. He expects that his readers are homosexual males, all of whom experience the cult of masculinity from one angle or another, and as a result, he is able to identify six ways 'to de-program from the cult.' Moreover, he expresses these in terms that individual homosexual men will understand. Griffin, on the other hand, tries to enlist everyone in her strategy, from lesbian sportswomen (both in and out), to sports administrators, coaches and families. In so doing, her strategy is unconvincing. What solace will a 19 year-old, almost-out lesbian basketballer find in the suggestion, for example, that 'academic faculty can conduct and sponsor graduate student research on social justice and diversity issues' (p. 219) or that athletic

departments can 'develop procedures for reviewing all personnel decisions for bias, conscious or unconscious' (p. 220)?

Notwithstanding this touch of over-ambition, *Strong Women* is, like *Life Outside*, a politically important work. Both books have the potential to instigate useful reflection on ways of improving sporting experiences.

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Christopher Hill, *Olympic Politics: Athens to Atlanta 1896-1996*. Second edition, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997. 283pp., US\$19.95pb.

Alfred Senn, *Power, Politics and the Olympic Games: A History of the Power Brokers, Events, and Controversies that Shaped the Games*. Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics, 1999. 336pp., US\$21.95pb.

Recent public interest in the political misdeeds of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) make these two volumes well timed. Together they provide a detailed historical account of the disputes, negotiations, and compromises associated with the modern Olympic Games since their founding by Pierre de Coubertin in 1896.

Alfred Senn offers an excellent historical overview of the Olympics and combines some of the more familiar political incidents (terrorism at the Munich Games, the protest of African-American runners in Mexico City) with a broad discussion of current issues including the use of drugs and the inclusion of professionals at the Games. The book aims to dispel the notion that the Olympic Games are a 'transnational' phenomenon rather than an 'international' one, where diplomatic tensions and politicking are the rule rather than the exception. Although the author astutely remarks that 'what appears to one observer as politics may not seem so to another' (p. xiv), he does not provide readers with a frame of reference. Senn prefers to integrate the political aspects of the Games into the various conflicts and controversies such as Canada's one-China policy and Atlanta's exaggerated boast of urban renewal. At times, some of the historical detail (eg., tables showcasing medal counts) distract the reader, particularly when they bare no relevance to the text. Despite this, Senn provides insights into the political motives of the different actors. For example, in describing the Juan Antonio Samaranch's intervention in talks between North and South Korea in 1985, Senn suggests that the IOC president's aim was 'to split North Korea from its supporters in the communist camp, particularly the Soviet Union and China' (p. 220).

Senn devotes considerable space to former IOC President Avery Brundage and to describing the circumstances surrounding some of his key decisions. Much of the discussion centres on Brundage's attempts to impose his ideals of 'Olympism' on international sport during the political conflicts and ideological battles of the Cold