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## ***Strike a Pose!:* Photographic Representation and the Construction of Gender in Athletic Team Photos, 1870-1930**

Although a number of historians have examined the role of sport in the definition of masculinity, little-if any-attention has been paid to the visual representations of men in sport from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. J.A. Mangan, E. Anthony Rotundo and others contend that sport was an important component in the construction of a masculine identity in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Great Britain and America. Most of this research has relied on traditional literary sources; only Allen Guttman, arguing that the erotic element in sport must be included in the "... debate over history and the social significance of the human body," has drawn on graphic material such as poems, portraits and photographs for primary source material.

Photography is a category of sources that has barely been analyzed by sport historians. And team photography-from yearbooks, student scrapbooks, and unpublished collections-has been overlooked completely. These portraits provide an opportunity to examine the body language displayed in athletic team photos in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Focusing on college and university yearbooks, I argue that the symbolic language displayed in these team photos can be viewed as conscious displays of the separate gender spheres of the period, but also as contradictory, even oppositional representations of contemporary notions of appropriate masculine and feminine mannerisms and behaviors.

In the late nineteenth century, athletic team photos show men in a variety of poses. One consistent element is that subjects are frequently shown touching one another in a very familiar-and what we would now see as 'non-masculine'-manner. This touching includes hands on shoulders, arms and thighs. In photos of women's athletic teams of the same era, the practice is much less conventional. And in photographs of co-educational, non-sport groups, such as debate clubs, the male subjects are often touching each other, while the women sit with their hands in their laps. By the second decade of the twentieth century, however, there is a dramatic difference in the posture of the men in athletic photos. Gone are the relaxed poses and physical contact of an earlier era; instead the subjects sit rigidly posed, usually with their hands by their sides, or gripping athletic equipment. These more purposeful poses represent the increasingly serious nature of college sport. They also reflect a change in the locus of control over the composition of the portraits: from the photographer (who, in accordance with late nineteenth-century practices, typically dictated the posture of the team members and may have included the tactile component for aesthetic reasons), to the coach.

An examination of this non-masculine behavior of “male touching” adds substantially to our understanding of the discourse about masculinity and sport in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The paper analyzes a variety of athletic team photos from a number of colleges and universities, together with student scrapbooks and letters from student-athletes at Cornell University to reflect on the sport experience and its meaning to the participants.



Mike Salter gives directions to the conferees.