This paper will review a selected historical account of ethnic minority women in sport. It will encompass African American, Asian American, and Latina/Mexican American women. It is important to note that even though there has been a growing scholarly interest concerning women and sport, one of the limitations is that the literature reflects the total focus on members of the dominant white or Anglo American culture. Research dealing with ethnic women in sport were relatively non-existent until the early 1990's. The lack of data concerning diverse cultural women and their involvement in sport made it a challenge to culminate an historical perspective. In the case of Latina/Mexican American women in sport, the historical account was not possible. Although, the striking information concerning the Latina American athlete makes up for the absence of historical information.

"The most striking feature of the historical record about African American female athletes is neglect"(Cahn, 1994, 126). African American women were and are ignored by the media and the athletic establishment. Despite debilitating laws of segregation and overt racism, many African American women had the opportunity to participate in sport through clubs organized especially for that purpose (Cahn, 1994; Emery, 1989). African American women have been participating in sport and athletics for many years (Cahn, 1994; Emery, 1989; Smith, 1992; Turner, 1995). The obstacles they have confronted have not stopped them from persevering, they just have not been recognized for their efforts. Some of these obstacles include African American women being viewed and treated differently than Anglo American women (Cahn, 1994; Hall, 1993; Smith, 1992). The African American woman was also given the stigma of being tough, hardworking domestic, or a working class individual (Cahn, 1994, 5). As a consequence of the "tough" stigma, it was perceived that the roughness and toughness of the sporting world would be a natural and an acceptable activity at which she would be competent (Cahn, 1994). This acceptance allowed the African American woman to participate in sport (Cahn, 1994; Smith, 1992). African American women were able to step to the fore of track and field because critics in the 1920's and 1930's attacked Anglo American female track athletes and labeled them "mannish women." These athletes were seen as "freaks of nature and as objects of horror rather than esteem"(Cahn, 1994, 114). The criticism was enough for most Anglo American women to vacate track and field and move to more defined sex appropriate sports, such as swimming, figure skating, tennis and golf (Cahn, 1994). African American track women forged ahead and were very successful. However, they were and to some extent still are invisible to the media (Cahn, 1994; Turner, 1995).

The Tennessee State Tigerbelles are one of the success stories that has gone relatively unrecognized. Substantial evidence of these women as a team cannot be found in any of the texts concerning women and sports, such as Women and Sport (Costa and Guthrie, 1995), Coming on Strong (Cahn, 1994), Sport, Men, and the Gender Order (Messner & Sabo, 1990). All of these textbooks are based on research regarding women and their sporting experience. Mention is made of specific Tigerbelles, such as Wyomia Tius and Wilma Rudolph, but nothing is dedicated to their accomplishment as a team. A majority of the information for this paper about the Tigerbelles was gathered from an article in the Orange County Register, written by an African American female sports writer, Miki Turner. The Tennessee State Tigerbelles dominated track and field, between 1950 and 1970 and won 23 Olympic medals (Turner, 1995). Along with an impressive medal count, the Tigerbelles also have a history of obstacles that did not stop them from reaching their potential.

These women pioneered well for the African American athlete of today. These unique women sacrificed so much, they endured practicing in cow pastures and had to push the cow's out of the way in order to make space to run. They traveled all night by car to get to competitions and had to find places to stay and restaurants that would serve them (Turner, 1995). Overt racism was a struggle these women lived with most of their lives until their experience with the Tigerbelles and college opened their eyes to world's other than "black and white" (Cahn, 1994; Turner, 1995). Willie White expressed this experience after the Melbourne Olympics in 1956. She described all people, of all nations, interacting, eating, running and just being together (Cahn, 1994; Turner, 1995). Wilma Rudolph, who overcame childhood polio, went on to be the first African-American woman to win three gold medals at the 1960 Olympics in Rome (Turner, 1995). She was only one of the 40 Tigerbelles who claimed 23 Olympic medals and only one of eight inducted into the National Track and Field Hall of Fame (Turner, 1995). It is a tragedy that these special women were not, and have not been celebrated (Cahn, 1994). They are the role models young American women of today so desperately need.

Investigation into the sport participation of Asian American women uncovered limited references. Only two sources of evidence were found. The first, an historical record of Japanese American girls and women in sport clubs during the 1930's and 1940's. And second, children's books that are dedicated to Kristi Yamaguchi and her sporting experience.

Historically, Asian American women in sport and athletics have been invisible. While accounts of Asian American women are not very salient, they were not totally absent from athletic activities. Due to the limitations of available resources the focus of this portion will be on Japanese American women. Encompassing all Asian American women in sport would have been ideal but unfortunately there is nothing dedicated to them. One gem of an article was written by Margaret Costa (1993) on Japanese American women's basketball
leagues during the 1930's and 1940's. Costa (1993) found her information about the Japanese American women's athletic leagues documented in the Rafu Shimpo, a Japanese newspaper that is still published today in Los Angeles.

JAPANESE = ENGLISH TRANSLATION

Issei = first generation Japanese American
Nisei = second generation Japanese American
Sansei = third generation Japanese American
Yonsei = fourth generation Japanese American

This focus will be on the Issei, and their children, the Nisei (see translation above). "The anti-Japanese exclusionists believed the Japanese people had customs, language, and physical features so different from the dominant white population that they could never be assimilated"(Costa, 1993, 37). Therefore, the Nisei grew up in a time when they were excluded from many educational and career opportunities. They did however meet their oppression with organized activities and created their own community bonds through the sport experience (Costa, 1993). Some of the barriers of oppression included the 1913 California Alien Land Act which prevented the Issei, from purchasing land, and the 1922 Naturalization Law prevented willing Japanese people from becoming US citizens and also halted Japanese immigration to the United States (Costa, 1993). The cessation of incoming Japanese immigrants imposed an artificial generation gap to form between the Issei and their Nisei children. Costa (1993) reported that differences in the generations became very apparent because the Nisei spoke mainly English, used American slang, attended American schools, and did not speak Japanese well.

The Nisei became very organized and often centered their community activities around sports and organizations that would keep them close together (Costa, 1993). Teenage sports for girls and boys were formed long before little leagues and boys' sex leagues (Costa, 1993). Social clubs were formed at the Central YWCA in Los Angeles which provided social, physical and leadership opportunities as well as empowering attributes of care, collectivity, and self-validation for Nisei girls and women (Costa, 1993). Activities defined as Japanese, such as language, dance, and flower arranging classes were offered as a platform for self-definition by Nisei women (Costa, 1993). This was a powerful organization for these young women because unfortunately, after all their efforts, the Nisei still suffered the same racial, spatial, and economic discrimination as the Issei by being forced to live and work in their own enclaves in Los Angeles (Costa, 1993).

All across southern California hundreds of young Japanese girls and women began playing sports which included basketball, baseball, softball, ping pong, volleyball, tennis, field hockey, aquatics, kendo, and handball (Costa, 1993). Their women's athletic union was not invented in victory but rather in sportsmanship. "At the end of each sports season, the team that was voted as having shown the best sportsmanship had its name inscribed on the sportsmanship plaque"(Costa, 1993, 41). This characteristic is similar to the Association of Intercollegiate Athletics for Women (IAAW) organized and governed women's collegiate athletics in the 1960's and early 1970's. They promoted sportsmanship, and camaraderie until they were consumed by the NCAA's money and competition.

"Nisei women athletes became empowered and their communities served as a source of support when Japanese American women were encountering race, gender, and class oppression"(Costa, 1993, 42). One Nisei athlete, Esther Fujimoto offers her experience by sharing: "We had something. We all belonged to clubs and we all played all of the sports, regardless of skill. I was very fortunate even though there was racial segregation. To-day kids don't have a core. It was fun growing up. (Costa, 1993, 43)." Much appreciation goes out to the Japanese American community and media for recognizing the importance of reporting women's athletics and leaving a history, a legacy of Japanese American women who were active in sport and athletics.

The second source of information on Asian American women involved in sport is about Kristi Yamaguchi. She is the most visible Japanese American female sport participant today. There have been numerous children's books dedicated to her personal life story as well as her triumphant Olympic gold medal in figure skating (Dekle, 1992; Lindop, 1996; Lobb, 1996; Marvis, 1994; Naden, 1996; Savage, 1993). She is also recognized in children's books for her athleticism as well as for being a successful Asian American (Lindop, 1996; Lobb, 1996; Marvis, 1994; Naden, 1996). She is a Yonsei, which means in all probability that she is farther from the origins of her cultural ethnicity and may be closer to mainstream American. In addition, she represents post-Title IX athletes only and her sport is one which has always been socially acceptable for women. One person cannot represent a whole race and Kristi Yamaguchi is no exception. The missing components that she does not represent are: Issei, Nisei, Sansei, pre-Title IX athletes, and women who participated in what are considered sex inappropriate sports. The stories of other Asian American women need to be part of the literature.

Kotoko Kroesner is an Asian American athlete who finds much happiness in her sport. She is 74 years of age, swims competitively but is not worried about the competition, she just loves to swim and to be involved. In a personal interview (Goo, 1997) she shared her philosophy about sport and her family background. Evidence of the cultural significance of her sport philosophy is shown in her sport focus. She is determined to keep swimming a hobby, it is her way of training herself to use good form, rather than being concerned with speed. She appreciates swimming and other sports for her well-being and happiness, has no structured workout schedule, except that she gets to the pool or the ocean three times a week. Kotoko feels this training is necessary because swimming has been a part of her life since she was a child in Japan. Her family would rent a beach house and her brothers and sister would swim from morning until night. Kotoko feels that she is active in sport because her family and her school introduced her to many activities as a young girl. Kotoko also shared a story about a job that she was offered in the middle of the week, and asked to start work that day. Even though she was flabbergasted, she decided it would be best to get a fresh start the following Monday. Many of her friends were puzzled at her decision, but she says “you need to think and then start fresh...so that's the way I was very ‘oriental’” (Goo, 1997). Evidently this woman is not concerned with how much money she will make or how fast she swims but rather her state of mind, and proper form are the things that are important to her in life. It is important for her to live gracefully. The Japanese culture follows an ethic of quality rather than quantity. Kotoko's life and sport philosophy parallel that Japanese cultural ideology. It was a wonderful experience meeting and talking with this vibrant, loving and energetic woman who thrives on challenging herself.

Kotoko Kroesner and Kristi Yamaguchi are only two examples of Asian American women involved in sport and physical activity. This is not enough information to have a true understanding of Asian American women's involvement in sport and to explore the impact of their cultural heritage on sport experience, although it is a beginning.

Latina and Mexican American women are another group that has long gone unnoticed with reference to their involvement in sport. The underrepresentation of the Latina athlete has long been given the excuse that ethnic cultural values are what keep Latinas away from the playing field. However, this assumption was called into question in an empirical study done by Kathy Jameson (1992) at California State University, Fullerton. She found evidence about the role that culture plays in physical activity for girls. In her master's thesis she compared the sport participation of Mexican American and Anglo American junior high school girls of high and low socio-economic
Findings showed that Mexican American girls with high SES scored low on traditional Mexican family values and all girls, Mexican and Anglo American, who were considered low SES scored high on traditional Mexican family values. The fact that economic circumstances rather than cultural traditional family values were apparently the determining factors in non-participation suggests that what has been termed cultural determinants may actually be family attitudes that have developed out of economic need. Jamieson (1992) also suggests that sport is a socializing factor in an athlete’s life, therefore girls who play sport may have been socialized to accept the values of the dominant culture. On the other hand, girls who have not played have not been socialized in the same way.

In another important article Jamieson (1995) discusses the strategies for effective interaction with students of Latin descent. This is an important contribution to the literature because it gives insight into the Latin cultures that might make a difference in attitudes. Knowledge on the part of all citizens will hopefully allow for greater understanding and acceptance of values and traditions different from those of the dominant culture.

It is evident through individual testimonies of African American, and Asian American women alike, that sport participation allowed them to experience camaraderie, worldly knowledge, deep satisfaction, leadership skills, a sense of belonging and self-validation. Proponents of women of color in sport also feel that the interpretations of experience can be best described by those who are experiencing the trials and struggles themselves. Birrell (1993) and Smith (1992) have both expressed the idea that every single woman is her own theorist, every woman’s experience is unique and her expression of that experience would be best interpreted by her. Thus, it is important for ethnic minority women of today to write about their own sport experience as well as that of others. It is important to note that unless we write about ourselves, our struggles and triumphs will continue to go un-noticed and stay invisible, thus keeping us silent, (Smith, 1992).

References


Cahn, S.K. (1994). Coming on Strong: Gender and sexuality in women's sport, 1900-1960 needs more infor


Barriers for Ethnic Minorities in Sport In the United Kingdom, we live in a multicultural society. There are people of all races and ethnic backgrounds that take part in sport at all levels. As a result of this, people often assume that they face no problems in sport. However, there is discrimination and disadvantage in sport as there is in everyday life for ethnic minorities. The negative perceptions about physical activity can last into adulthood, making it more difficult for these women to engage in sport. Therefore, cultural and environmental barriers seem to be the determining factor in young Muslim women's attitudes towards participation in sport. One major factor affecting participation in sport for ethnic minorities is racism. NCAA Ethnic Minority and Women's Internship offers an opportunity for a minority, female college student to be chosen for a unique two-year internship program. The program will focus primarily on compliance, athletic communications and special events for The Rensselaer Athletics Department and its intercollegiate varsity programs. This internship is for a student who has experience in communications and media relations in a sports environment. The intern will be part of a senior leadership team with responsibility for media relations, website maintenance, pre- and post-game interviews, an Among ethnic minority communities, participation is well below the national average. Only 12.5% of Asian women do enough exercise each week to benefit their health compared to 18.8% of White women (3 x 30 minutes – Active People Survey 2007). This clearly demonstrates that there is a need for specific interventions to be developed to ensure that Muslim women specifically have the opportunity to participate in sport and physical activity, and also to gain from the associated health benefits that being active brings. Comparisons between Muslim women's attitudes towards sport in different countries have provided interesting results. In traditional Muslim countries attitudes are actually far more positive towards PE than in the UK.