

health & wellbeing

MAGGIE FRAMPTON MSW ACSW
LICENSED CLINICAL SOCIAL WORKER

PSYCHOTHERAPY • CONSULTATION
ADULTS • ADOLESCENTS

MONTPELIER, VT
(802) 229-5071

PROFESSIONAL
CONFIDENTIAL

802.660.8396

Diane M. Felicio, Ph.D.

mediator

relationships

organizations

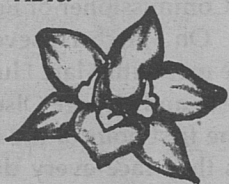
higher education

constructive conflict resolution with
an emphasis on encouragement,
clarity, and support.

Sari K. Wolf, RN, CCRN, TMP, CAP, Reiki III

Happily announces the opening of her new office
with a gift of **10% off your first visit!**

Massage/ Myofascial Therapy
Aromatherapy
Acu-Pressure



call for appointment 802-223-4715

Michael Gigante, Ph.D.

Psychosynthesis
Counseling & Therapy

(802) 254-8032 15 Myrtle Street, Brattleboro VT 05301

Montpelier
229-5220

Burlington
860-6360

JOSIE JUHASZ, M.A.
Lic. Psychologist - Master

LYNN GOYETTE, M.S., M.A.
Lic. Clinical Mental Health Counselor

sliding fee scale

insurance accepted

COUNSELING CENTER OF NORTHERN VERMONT

Carol L. Thayer, M.D.

Family Physician

KAISER PERMANENTE



NORTHEAST DIVISION

Georgia Health Center

RR#2, Box 1160 Fairfax, VT 05454

Tel: 802/524-9595

Fax: 802/524-2867

Lesbians and Sports

by Esther
Rothblum

DYKE PSYCHE



Until recently, there was little open discussion about lesbians in sports. The media focused on Billie Jean King's "palimony" suit, Martina Navratilova's break-up with her romantic partner, and the "lesbian presence" in professional golf. Of course, lesbian sports fans could give you the names of lesbians athletes, coaches, and media sports reporters—but these women were very, very closeted.

Now Pat Griffin has written the book *Strong Women, Deep Closets: Lesbians and Homophobia in Sports*. "I've been a lesbian athlete and coach myself so a big part of this book comes from my own experience" she told me in a recent interview, "and over the last 15 years or so I've taken on this topic as a semi-crusade."

Pat herself played sports in high school and college, and then went on to coach high school and college students. She lived with her lesbian lover but dated the high school wrestling coach for "cover." As she writes in her book: "I remember a teacher evaluation meeting I had with the principal of the high school where I taught and coached. He complimented me because I presented such a good image for physical education, not like some of the other women P.E. teachers and coaches in the country." Though he never explicitly mentioned being a lesbian, I knew exactly what he meant and covered further back in my closet."

Later on, Pat began to come out, first by attending lesbian events and then by speaking openly about homophobia at women athletic conferences. After a lifetime as an athlete and coach, she is currently professor at the University of Massachusetts in Amherst in a program on social justice education. "I see myself as an educator/activist," she told me, "and a lot of that comes from my sport and physical education background. I have coaches in my classes now, and some of what I say blows their minds, particularly when I talk about heterosexism. In athletics, this topic is so silent."

Strong Women, Deep Closets focuses on the fact that homophobia doesn't just affect lesbians, but all women athletes and coaches. The lesbian label is used to intimidate

women. "The main message that I'd like women to get is how lesbians are demonized in sports, and how that works to the detriment of women's athletics in general," said Pat. "There is so much divisiveness among women in sports—heterosexual women are afraid of being called lesbians and they resent lesbians and blame them for having caused this 'image problem.' I want women in sports to realize that it's to their advantage to work together against that kind of intimidation—that's how women's sports is going to grow. It's not going to grow by women being embarrassed by the lesbians and insisting that the lesbians be closeted, or being defensive about their own femininity. Whenever women put energy into that, they're taking energy away from being strong women and being the best athletes and coaches they can be."

"I wish there were more lesbians that could come out," Pat continued. "Some of it is internalized homophobia. Some of it is the nature of athletics—athletes and coaches are often not particularly political. Coaches don't want to do anything that is controversial, especially at the Division I college level where it could hurt their recruiting efforts."

Pat finds that Division II or III coaches are often more open about their lesbianism. "They don't have that public scrutiny and they're less dependent on recruiting."

Even lesbian fans are invisible. A recent article in *The Advocate* was entitled "Phantom fans: Nobody wants to admit they're there, but the lesbian presence at professional women's basketball games is obvious." Of the two professional women's basketball leagues, Pat Griffin has found the ABL to be more openly welcoming to lesbian fans than the

WNBA. She says this reflects the fact that the WNBA is controlled by the male NBA.

Increasingly, though, lesbians in sports are coming out. In its November 1997 issue, *Out Magazine* reported on Division I coach Karen Weaver, who was fired as field hockey coach from Ohio State University. Now she is suing for anti-lesbian discrimination. Lesbian filmmaker and Oscar nominee Dee Mosbacher has produced the film *Out for a Change* (WomanVision Productions) about lesbians in sports. As Pat writes in the conclusion of her book: "In my vision, women will take pride in our athleticism without apology. Women will not be constrained by socially constructed notions of femininity or compulsory heterosexuality. There will be no need to apologize about muscularity, physical competence, or passion for and commitment to sport....In my vision of sport, women will value our relationships with other women. We will not be self-conscious about loving teammates and competitors as friends or lovers." *Strong Women, Deep Closets* can be obtained from Human Kinetics, 1607 North Market St., PO Box

further reading—

If it's a rainy day, or your favorite sport is over for the season, here are some books with a lesbian sports theme to enjoy:

GENERAL FICTION: *Sportsdykes: Stories From On and Off the Field*, edited by Susan Fox Rogers. St. Martin's Press, 1994. *Sweat*, edited by Lucy Jane Bledsoe. Seal Press, 1995. *A Whole Other Ballgame: Women's Literature and Women's Sport*, edited by Joli Sandoz. Noon Day Press, 1997.

LESBIANS IN BASKETBALL: *The Necessary Hunger*, by Nina Revoyr. Simon and Shuster, 1997. *Lady Lobo*, by Kristen Garrett. New Victoria Publishers, 1993.

LESBIANS IN TENNIS: *Courted*, by Celia Cohen. Naiad Press, 1997. *Forty Love*, by Diana Simmonds. Naiad Press, 1997.

LESBIANS IN SWIMMING: *The Sea of Light*, by Jennifer Levin. Penguin Books, 1993.

5076, Champaign, IL 61825-5076.

Esther Rothblum is Professor of Psychology at the University of Vermont and Editor of the *Journal of Lesbian Studies*, and can be contacted at the Department of Psychology, John Dewey Hall, University of Vermont, Burlington, VT 05405, email e_rothbl@dewey.uvm.edu. "Dyke Psyche" is a monthly column.

© Esther Rothblum