

Gender and the Mascots of Coeducational High School and Collegiate Mascots

The intersection of race and sports has had sustained though somewhat oscillating degrees of visibility for several decades. About 40 years a number of education institutions were persuaded to change their Native American related team names or mascots. For example, in 1968 the Dartmouth Indian became the Dartmouth Big Green, while in 1972 the Stanford Indian became the Stanford Cardinal. Other schools resisted repeated calls for voluntary change. Through great persistence, activists persuaded the NCAA to take a stand against the use of Native American signifiers in college sports in 2005 and as a result another wave of schools eliminated the use of Native America team names or mascots. In 2010 Akron Ohio's East High finally dropped the name "Orientals" for its sports teams.

Where persuasion failed, litigation has been deployed toward the same goal. Though civil rights claims failed to gain traction, suits demanding cancellation of Native American associated trademarks have achieved occasional success. Though activists still have a lot of work to do on this issue, there seems to be a dawning recognition by a growing proportion of society that naming a sports team a racial epithet such as "Redskins" as the name for an NFL team, or using an ugly and stereotypical caricature of a Native American leader dubbed "Chief Wahoo" as the mascot for an MLB team, are deeply problematic and completely unnecessary.

There is a different and less recognized problem related to gender and sports signifiers. From kindergarten through college, many students attend coeducational schools with male identified team names and/or mascots, and almost none attend coeducational schools with female identified team names and/or mascots. Some team names are overly gendered, such as "Anchormen," "Blue Boys," "Knights," "Gamecocks," "Dutchmen," "Bulls" and "Cowboys." Others are facially gender neutral, but associated with mascots that are decidedly masculine. Team mascots almost always wear pants, and if there is anything that bathroom doors have us, it is that figures wearing pants are male. They also typically have male secondary sex characteristics. For example, chicken mascots tend to be depicted with large combs and wattles, and lion mascots almost always have manes. Sometimes the mascots have male associated nicknames, such as Rhett the Boston University Terrier, and Peter the U.C. Irvine Anteater.

This paper will map the scope of the problem, providing empirical data and illustrative anecdotes about the sexism that team names and mascots can build into school sports programs. It will also consider ways that activists might productively address overwhelming sports signifier gender disparities.

<http://www.totalprosports.com/2012/09/28/20-ridiculous-high-school-team-names/#21>

http://colorlines.com/archives/2014/08/navajo_kindergartener_told_to_cut_his_hair_sent_home_on_first_day_of_school.html