“sport produces a narrative structure around physical superiority in which sex differences are understood as, and thus reproduced as, real and meaningful” (Birrell & Cole, 1990).

“because of the notion that sport belongs to men, there remain deep-seated and persistent barriers to girls in sport: gender stereotyping, sexism, and homophobia” (Mary Jo Kane, 2000).

“what we might term the racial signification of sport means that sport contests are more than just significant events, in and of themselves important, but rather that they act as a key signifier for wider questions about identity within racially demarcated societies in which racial narratives about the self and society are read both into and from sporting contests that are imbued with racial meanings” (Carrington, 1998).

Sport is a social practice and a place where major cultural and political debates about identity, community and politics are staged and performed. In this course we begin from the assumption that sport is key site where the meanings of race and gender are articulated in historically and culturally specific ways whose impact extends beyond the playing fields. This course explores both the cultural meaning and the political significance of the organization and representation of social relations between different groups. We explore the link between athleticism and heteronormativity as well as the impact of rigid codes of behaviour on sexual politics and social relations in various communities and the ways in which sexual and gender discourses are shaped by race and racism. We also examine the complexity and diversity of social relations among women and between women and men. A related interest is the relationship between violence and athletes (e.g. the stalking of female athletes, domestic violence, as well as sexual assault of women by male athletes). We will explore both popular and critical analytical sources: the course format includes lectures, discussion, media viewing (e.g., sport films, events, television programs) and student presentations. Moreover we will draw from a range of disciplines which include critical race scholarship, feminist scholarship, cultural studies and sport studies as we consider the complex ways in which sport contributes to our broader understanding of discourses of sexuality, gender and race at this historical and political moment. In sum, one of the aims of this course is for students to develop and apply critical thinking skills to learn and understand the ways in which sport links us to established meanings, signs and symbols that are embedded in our common sense understanding of race, gender and sexuality.

Course Materials:
A course reader containing the course readings will be available for purchase.
Supplementary readings will be on reserve in the library.

Evaluation:
Attendance and Participation: 10%
Class Presentation: 10%
In Class Midterm: 25%
Reading Responses (2X 15): 30%
Final Paper: 25%

The Department of Women’s Studies encourages clarity of thought and expression and good writing. Students will be evaluated on these skills in all courses given by the Department.