

Shasa Genas

November 1, 2015

Professor Koehone

ENWR 100

### **Sport stereotypes.**

Stereotypes are everywhere in the world. It is a concept that has been dragging behind generations for centuries with little hope of ever leaving. Too many people in society unknowingly use stereotypes during discussions or conversations. As much as we (society) want to believe that stereotypes do not exist. Research has shown that they do exist especially in sports. I have noticed from my own experience that, some people are completely oblivious when it comes to stereotypes or things in general that do not affect them directly. Society has implemented the “mind your business rule” which simply means if the situation is not about you there is no reason as to why you should speak on the behalf of that person or that specific problem. Society has taught us not to necessarily care about how the things we say or do might affect other people. So often times people use stereotypes in sports with no type of remorse whatsoever for that athlete, and many times they face little or no consequences. First of all stereotypes are erroneous and damaging to so many individuals. Furthermore often athletes suffer emotionally and that emotionally instability can interfere with their performance. Stereotypes also destroys confidence which can also interfere with their performance as well as hinder others from participating in anything sports related.

I read an article called “Athletic Black Vs. Smart White: Why Stereotypes are wrong.” by Casey Gane-McCalla and I got some insight on some stereotypes in sports that I should have

been paying attention to but wasn't. I blamed my lack of knowledge on the issue of sports stereotypes on my athletic abilities; because I don't play sports or very rarely willingly got involved in anything pertaining to sports, I never really thought about the stereotypes that affected people within the sport industry. Which goes back to what I mentioned earlier about society being oblivious to things that do not affect them directly. Gane-McCalla mentions a stereotype that stood out to me; he stated, "white men can't jump and black men can't read defenses."(name #) Looking back, growing up I would always hear stories about white men not possessing the ability to play sports as well as black men. According to society white men are not supposed to know how to play sports well, however I found it interesting that white men such as" Eli Manning, Peyton Manning, Tom Brady, Tim Tebow, and Michael Phelps all made it to the 2015 top 25 best players list"(The 20) proving stereotypes wrong.

Another stereotype in sports is that black men can't read. This stereotype stems from slavery when African Americans weren't allowed to read and some African Americans still have problems reading but every culture has a selected group of people that cannot read or has problem reading. Gane-McCalla proves these stereotypes wrong when he mentioned an African American male, Myron Rolle who "became the first U.S athlete to win the Rhodes Scholarship since Bill Bradley, he bypassed a career in the NFL to get an education from Oxford University, one of the world's most prestigious schools."

Gane-McCalla also mentions a stereotype that was around a long time before it was proven wrong. "African Americans were discouraged from playing quarterback and asked to play other positions in high school, college and the professional rank"(Gane-McCalla #). According to the NFL Quarterbacks were smart, intellectual men and Black Men were not considered Intellectual. So instead of getting the chance to pursue their dreams to be a QB or the

star player, they had to play other positions that they did not necessarily like. Being deprived of playing a position you have been dreaming of your whole entire life can mess with your mind and that will mess with your ability to perform because you are not focused.

There is also a fallacious stereotype that suggests that all women's sports are inferior to men's sports.

“The whole idea that women's sports are inferior to men's sports probably has a lot to do with the belief that males are more athletically gifted than females. But that's not entirely true. While sports centered around physicality and contact, like football and hockey, are more built for men, there are sports where women excel. Take a sport like gymnastics, which requires an incredible blend of strength and finesse. What's that you say? Gymnastics isn't really a sport? Well, what if we told you that the frequency and severity of injuries suffered in gymnastics is comparable to any of the aforementioned rough house sports?” (Martinez)

Female gymnasts encounter more serious injuries than participants in any other male dominated sport and yet gymnastics is not considered a real sport. In my opinion gymnastics is not considered a real sport because it is dominated by females and in society females are considered weak. As Martinez mentioned society does not place women's strength and men's strength in the same category. Men are considered the superior of the two, according to society they are stronger than women. So when a sport like gymnastics, a women dominated sport, is proven to be more challenging than football or hockey, of course society would find a way of degrading the sport. The stereotype that women's sport is inferior to men's sport has lingered around for centuries, some women choose not to participate in anything sports related because they are taught that they will never be good enough to participate in sports because it was originally designed for

men. Whether it is height, speed, strength, or the ability to catch a ball, men are supposed to excel and women are supposed to stick to gender roles, via work, cook, and clean, and the athletic portion of life to men. Women are still not being respected in the sports industry the way they should be and people fail to realize that a woman is capable of doing whatever it is a man can do; like being an incredible athlete. The high level of disrespect for women in the sports industry often causes them to quit to the game they wanted to play more than anything in the world.

There is also a stereotype society calls the Dumb Jock syndrome. This stereotype suggests that most athletes are dumb and popular. I was previously a believer of this stereotype but when I saw the effects the stereotype have on some athletes I had to stop, think, and reevaluate myself. When society judges you based on what they see on the outside that can be really hurtful and you will start believing that you are what society says you are even though society is wrong. Thomas Dee, a professor in the Stanford Graduate School of Education, states that “if a student-athlete believes he or she is looked at as a "dumb jock," that anxiety may become self-fulfilling. Student-athletes who were reminded of their jock identities scored about 12 percent lower on Graduate Record Examination (GRE)-style tests, relative to nonathletes.”(‘Stereotypes’).

Another fallacious stereotype in sports is that gay men can't play sport because “gay men are too soft” (Zeigler pg#). A gay man is considered a woman because he now chooses to be feminine and women are considered too soft to play a contact sport. Growing up my brothers never wanted to play sports with me because according to them I was too girly because I couldn't throw the ball as far as the other boys could, but why should my athletic abilities prevent another female or gay man who was blessed with the ability to play sport, the

opportunity to play with the boys? In the article “Derrick Gordon Finds His Freedom” by Cyd Zeigler. Zeigler talks about NBA player Derrick Gordon who shared the story of his coming out to his teammates and the way they treated him, because being gay is not really accepted in the sport industry. Derrick expressed the effects of the jokes his team mate told about him being gay. He began to distance himself from his teammates and became depressed. When he finally came out to his team the jokes stopped and they welcomed him with open arms. Like I mentioned earlier, people say or do things that could potentially affect other people but society has taught us not to care if we are not the person being ridicule. Derrick's story basically elaborated on how some gay athletes might feel, and how hard it is to come out to a group of people who make fun of you for what you are, for something you have no control over with little or no remorse.

In conclusion, Stereotypes affect athletes emotionally and half of society is completely oblivious of the effects their words have on athletes not only does the words thrown at them make them emotionally unstable, it also interferes with their drive to succeed as well as their ability to perform. As a society we need to wake up and realize that our words have power, weather it is good or bad, it affects people. Many people have given up on their goals and dreams because of a horrific stereotype that holds more power than society allows us to believe.

#### **Work Cited.**

"The 20 Biggest Stereotypes in Sports History." *Complex*. Web. 9 Nov. 2015.

Gane-McCalla Casey, “Athletic Blacks vs. Smart Whites: Why Stereotypes Are Wrong” *News One* (2009).

Zeigler Cyd, “Derrick Gordon finds his freedom” *Outsports.com* (2014)

"Stereotypes Can Affect Athletes' Academic Performance, Stanford Researcher Says." Stanford University. Web. 16 Nov. 2015.