

Boutilier, Mary A. and SanGiovanni, Lucinda. *The Sporting Woman*. Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics Publ., 1983. xii + 307 pp. Notes, references, index. \$21.95 (cloth).

Until recently, the "sporting woman" was an anomaly if not an oxymoron, connoting images of the demimondaine, not a baseball player. Women's exclusion from the male bastion of sports has been eroded in the last decade, however, by feminist activism, Title IX legislation, the fitness movement, and the commercial exploitation of women's athletics. Scholars and the mass media alike have celebrated women's movement into sports as a sign of progress toward greater equality between the sexes. This book questions that belief, and in so doing, helps to change the terms of the debate over women's sports participation. Political scientist Mary Boutilier and sociologist Lucinda SanGiovanni analyze sports as a patriarchal institution supporting male values and power in society. Although women's participation has risen, they argue, there have been no significant changes in the conceptualization of sports or its links to a masculinist culture. Women will remain the "other" without a radical transformation of sporting activity

In making this argument, Boutilier and SanGiovanni use a multi-disciplinary approach, marshalling evidence from social psychology, sociology, history and political science to explain women's past exclusion from sport and the dimensions of their current involvement. The struggle for women's access to sports over the last hundred years has occurred at the same time that athletics has become a rationalized, bureaucratic, and quantified activity. This broad process of modernization, reaching into most aspects of daily life, ironically led to the identification of sports as a last refuge for masculine assertion, where men could test their strength, individual skill and bravery. Modern sports thus affirms a constellation of values that do not speak to women's consciousness and experiences, and virtually excludes them by definition. The barriers to women's involvement in sports are reinforced by institutional sexism and agencies of socialization. Boutilier and SanGiovanni document the ways in which public policy, educational institutions, and the mass media continue to foster women's subordinate status in the world of sports. Two contributors to the volume, Susan Birrell and Susan Greendorfer, examine the social learning of gender-appropriate behavior for its effects on individual women's decision to participate in sports activities. Despite the present upsurge in women's participation, patterns of segregation persist. Women continue to pursue sports which conflict least with social definitions of femininity, and are found most often in such individual activities as gymnastics and tennis. They remain outsiders to sports which promote group

bonding, teamwork, negotiation, and conflict resolution. Needless to say, these are qualities men find quite useful in the world of business and politics.

Central to the book's argument is a critique of male-defined social science and liberal feminist theory. In the tradition of feminist scholarship, Boutilier and SanGiovanni incisively expose the male bias in much of the sociological literature on women and sports. They assail embedded assumptions about "women's nature," research methodologies which take men's behavior to be normative, and false claims to scientific objectivity. The authors argue for a feminist social science that is both sensitive to women's experiences and activist in intention, finding qualitative and interactionist approaches particularly useful. At the same time, they survey the different strands of feminist theory for analyses of women's subordination that may be fruitfully applied to the world of sports. They strongly challenge the dominant theoretical position, liberal feminism, for its reliance on equal opportunity and civil rights as the solution to women's exclusion from sporting activity. Criticizing the liberal failure to question the institution of male sports itself, Boutilier and SanGiovanni persuasively argue for radical changes which would diminish the competitive, exclusive, and commercial aspects of sports, affirming values traditionally defined as female.

The authors are more successful in their critique of the received wisdom than in the actual development of an analysis rooted in the experience of women. While they examine modernization as a male process, they pay little attention to the changing rhythms of women's labor and leisure, which also had an impact on female athletic participation. Moreover, the notion of a "female experience" is a problematic one which needs further examination. Women and men may experience the world differently, but that does not necessarily lead to a shared female culture; clearly further research is needed that explores the diversity of women's lives, particularly as affected by class and race. Their model also dichotomizes "authentic" feminist consciousness from that which is traditional and "false," a division which implicitly devalues the social experiences of many women. Still, the theoretical framework and research agenda they propose advances the study of women and sports significantly. Sports scholars should find much to ponder in their critique of social science and their call for a rethinking of the field. And for feminists, *The Sporting Woman* makes a compelling case for the limitations of being "one of the boys."

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