

Guest Editor's Introduction

Roberta J. Park
Berkeley, CA

Women's history and *sport history* emerged in the 1970s. During the 1980s both developed rapidly, with women's history in the lead. New sources were explored: new and more densely-textured questions were asked: and more comprehensive analyses were offered. Both areas also witnessed the growth of specialized sub-fields, resulting in increasing calls for syntheses and more attention to theoretical interpretations. For "sport," a useful step in this direction was taken with volume 10 of the *Journal of Sport History* in which five contributors analyzed "progress and prospects" in Ancient, European, British, Canadian, and American historiography. That same year (1983), I urged readers of the *Research Quarterly for Exercise and Sport* to assay broader theoretical frameworks yet not abandon carefully documented studies which provide the bases for theoretical advances. Hopefully, this present volume will be a contribution to both approaches.

Within the scholarly community, the acceptance of both sport history and women's history has been hindered by a similar preconception. Each has been considered "marginal" by many academics. Happily, the achievements of the last two decades make this stance increasingly difficult to support. Works like *Making Imperial Mentalities: Socialization and British Imperialism*, edited by J. A. Mangan, and Steven Riess's *City Games: The Evolution of American Urban Society*—to cite only two recent publications—show that, far from trivial, the study of playgrounds, games-playing, exercise, and the like has opened new windows on the past.

In the 1980s, the term "gender" was increasingly used—and often debated. The inaugural issue (March 1987) of *Gender and Society* opened with the statement: "Our focus is the social aspect of gender, which we see not as an additional variable or categorical factor, but one of the foundations of every existing social order. In this perspective, women and men are not automatically compared; rather gender categories themselves are questioned. . . ." (p. 3) That same year, Joan Wallace Scott wrote in *Gender and Politics in History*: "Gender, then, provides a way to decode meaning and to understand complex connections among various forms of human interaction." (p. 46) Far from being monolithic, conceptions of "gender" may be influenced by race, ethnicity, chronological age, social class, political status, and much more. For many (and I include myself in this group) "gender" can best—and probably only—be

understood from comparative perspectives. This assumption has shaped this volume.

To date, considerably more attention has been devoted to female than to male constructions. "Men's studies," as Michael Kimmel observed in *Changing Men: New Directions in Research on Men and Masculinity* (1987), drew heavily on the pioneering work in women's studies. Athletics, physical culture, and exercise, which intentionally and explicitly give prominence to the body, offer rich and still untilled soil for historical investigations of *icons* and *metaphors* of male as well as female bodies. We await, for example, a companion volume to Martha Banta's *Imaging the American Woman: Idea and Ideals in Cultural History* (which contains a small section on turn-of-the century athletics). Ludmilla Jordanova's *Sexual Visions: Images of Gender in Science and Medicine Between the Eighteenth and Twentieth Centuries* and Thomas Laqueur's *Making Sex: Body and Gender From the Greeks to Freud* raise methodological and substantive issues which should be of considerable interest to those who study exercise, physical culture, and sport.

The editor of any "special issue" has several tasks—almost all of which are exceedingly pleasant. I am grateful to Editor Steven Riess for allowing me wide latitude in the selection of topics and contributors and for his constant dedication to the highest standards of editorship. The challenge that was put before authors was that the volume was intended to be "comprehensive and broad-ranging," including both male and female constructions, interests, and events. Each author has met this challenge as the reader will quickly discern. The volume is their product far more than it is mine.

These essays share common threads: they also illuminate important differences. National origin, religion, socio-economic status, rural/urban factors, whether one is free or oppressed—and more—bear a significant relationship to sport, gender, physical culture, etc. Nancy Struna investigates patterns of popular consumption, using estate inventories, tavern licensure, and similar data to reconstruct American sporting behaviors between 1750 and 1810. Colonial women in the Chesapeake and elsewhere were considerably more involved in male-dominated sporting practices than has been customarily believed. Following the Revolutionary War, Republicanism—and especially capitalism—began to alter male-female relationships, resulting in a *code of the sportsman* and a *cult of domesticity* which more sharply defined normative roles for males and females. By the late 1700s, middle and upper-class Anglo-Americans were increasingly dividing the world into "separate spheres."

By the 1860s, the notion of "separate spheres," which had become a well-accepted middle-class doctrine, was given increased legitimacy by both social and biomedical interpretations of evolution. My essay on iconographic and metaphorical representations of male and female bodies—particularly in and through exercise, physical culture, and athletics—draws upon medical, educational, gynecological, exercise, athletic, and physical culture literature. With indebtedness to the work of Patricia Vertinsky, I seek to elucidate Victorian anxieties about both female and male bodies and look at ways in which

“science” has been (and still is) invoked to sanction established dogma. Professor Vertinsky adds to her pioneering work by focusing upon concepts of the aging process, showing how deeply cultural assumptions affect medical and “scientific” approaches to health, illness, *and* personal worth. Menopause, which physiologically signified the cessation of a woman’s “useful” life, condemned her to a sedentary lifestyle. Although the onset might be less rapid, men were also victims of the aging process even if a few were able to persist into their seventies in gymnastics, pedestrianism, cycling and other athletic feats. Using pseudo-scientific analogies and the efficiency rhetoric of the early 1900s, the “unproductive” older man and woman were increasingly portrayed as a social as well as biomedical “problem.”

Were the values which pervaded American thought concerning exercise, physical training and athletics the same for Blacks or members of various immigrant groups? Gwendolyn Captain addresses the first question by examining aspirations and accomplishments of men and women who saw themselves as leaders of an emerging middle-class African-American community. Deeply disappointed by the failed promises of Reconstruction, Black Americans were forced to establish their own churches, businesses, colleges, Y.M.C.A.s, and sporting organizations. For the most part, these replicated—to the extent possible—those of the dominant society. Whereas white women were obliged to struggle for educational, social, and political emancipation, black women were faced with the double burden of struggling for both their sex and their race. Black men were confronted by the burden of being deemed “inferior” in a culture which placed extreme importance on male superiority. In sport they faced a particular paradox. If they excelled athletically (a salient Victorian value), they were seen as a threat. Moreover, their successes could be—and frequently were—diminished by attributing these to their “baser, less-evolved” nature. Religion and cultural traditions created a different dynamic for Jewish immigrants in turn-of-the-century America, as George Eisen has insightfully shown. A long tradition in which the “spiritual” was valued over the “sensual and physical” gave precedence to intellectual rather than athletic accomplishments. First generation community leaders valued participation in sports and recreations for reasons of health, to Americanize new immigrants, or as constructive alternatives to inducements of crowded ghettos. The comparatively affluent German-Jewish community, which had taken root after 1848, had the tradition of the Turnverein upon which to rely. Arrivals from Poland and Russia from 1880 onwards, however, had neither a sporting tradition nor socio-economic status. “Working girls clubs” provided opportunities for diversion and contributed to their emancipation from traditional, family-oriented roles.

Richard Holt’s essay provides useful perspectives on the complex ideologies which reinforced gender roles in France between 1870 and 1914. Responses to cycling reflected men’s attitudes toward women. While a few male commentators might be willing to admit that the bicycle provided beneficial mild exercise, most were concerned that it would unsex women and make them unfit

mothers. Anything that “undermined the rationale of masculinity” was anathema to a society recuperating from defeat in the France-Prussian War. When a few gymnastic clubs began to form special sections for working-class women, the purpose was to maintain health, combat the threat of “neurasthenia,” and, it was hoped, benefit the birthrate.

The reader is returned to issues which have to do with the presentation of the body in “naturism” (*Naturismus*) and “racial hygiene” (*Rassenhygiene*), which in a different context is also concerned with the issue of “birthrate.” Drawing upon physical culture, *Turnen* (gymnastics), and sport sources, Arnd Kruger has examined the “biosocial construction of gender.” In the late 1800s, public nudity became increasingly accepted in Germany in contrast to Anglo-Saxon countries, where it was a criminal offense. The beauty movement, the youth movement, natural healing, and physical culture were all incorporated. (Nudists today form an association within the German Sports Federation—DSB.) The “common ideological denominator,” Dr. Kruger argues, “was a German brand of Social Darwinism” —*racial hygiene*. This elevated Germanic and Nordic races, reduced women to their reproductive function, and found virulent expression in Nazi doctrines. “Naturism” had the support of sport leaders like F. A. Schmidt and Ferdinand Hueppe.

Both gender *and* class have exerted powerful influences on English sport. Kathleen McCrone turns her attention to working-class sport between 1890 and 1914. Whereas the English public school fostered games-playing for girls as well as for boys, lower-class children were given military drill and Swedish gymnastics. The Original English Lady Cricketers (the first “professional” women’s team) had a brief existence in the 1890s. The All England Women’s Hockey Association (which subscribed to public-school values) refused for years to recognize the working-class Ladies Hockey League. The paternalistic Cadbury and Rowntree chocolate firms established sports programs for their employees which perpetuated gender constructs. Female players were encouraged to “behave like ladies” even though their social standing realistically excluded them from that class. For working-class women—even more than for working-class men—progress could only come when and if traditional roles were broken down.

The volume closes with James Riordan’s timely survey of women and sport from Czarist Russia to Perestroika. Although the condition of women ameliorated after the October Revolution, full equality was not attained. The *Zhenotdel* (women’s department) met opposition for years, especially in Moslem communities where the Soviets attempted to use sport to foster acculturation. The First Central Asian Olympiad (1920)—in part “intended to strike a blow for women’s liberation”—engendered local hostility. Whereas in the years following the Revolution of 1917 there were few inhibitions against women taking up any sport, during the 1930s a renewed emphasis on the family rendered many gains temporary. It was the entrance of the U.S.S.R. into Olympic competitions in 1952 which launched a wide range of elite sports for women, whose successes

were seen as necessary for advancing Soviet superiority in international competitions and Soviet ideology.

Anyone who reflects upon the last two decades will surely see many advances for women in sport. The Educational Amendments Act of 1972 (especially Title IX thereof) forced colleges and universities to greatly expand their athletic programs for women. In recent years, however, increasing concern has been expressed over the decline of females in major administrative positions in these programs. It is still not entirely clear what the trickle-down effect has been. Additionally, while women may now participate more freely and fully in a range of sports, exercise, and fitness activities, a quick glance at popular magazines should remind us that a great deal of "gender stereotyping" for *both* males and females is encoded in articles and advertisements about weight rooms, health centers, and much more.