

# The American Woman in Sport: A Reexamination of Power In Amateur Sport Organizations in the Early Twentieth Century

VIRGINIA L. EVANS

San Diego State University

Women's relationship to power in amateur sport organizations in the 1910s and 1920s was reexamined by studying the role of gender in power relations rather than adhering to a market model of power. The primary influence on the reconsideration of women and power in amateur sport organizations was a book by Nancy Harstock, *Money, Sex, and Power*. An important focus of Harstock's discussion was that the exercise of power is the exercise of domination.

Two amateur associations, the Amateur Athletic Union and the United Golf Association, served as examples of women's power relationships in amateur sport. During the 1910s, the AAU placed women swimmers under its governance structure and in the 1920s it added other women athletes. The USGA withstood women's quest for an autonomous national organization in the late 1910s and 1920s. In both organizations women were dominated by men and remained powerless.

This reexamination of women and power in sport organizations focused upon the idea that women's lack of power in sport associations was not a matter of choice, either at the conscious or unconscious level. Rather there appeared to be no choice for females to exercise power as long as males were either involved in the organization or expressed a desire to control the sport. This viewpoint differs from the commonly accepted opinion that women chose not to exercise power in amateur sport organizations in the 1920s, particularly women physical educators.

Power relations need further study based on gender. It is necessary to rethink women's positions in male/female sport organizations to determine whether women's lack of power was due to choice, coercion, inequality, domination, and/or a combination of all the preceding.