

Women's History and Women's Sport History: Exploring the Connections.

Catrina M. Parratt
Ohio State University

In this paper it is argued that, despite recent advances in the study of women's sport history, a re-assessment of the scholarship's underlying assumptions and basic principles is required. To date, these have largely derived from a male-created and male-biased scholarship. It is suggested that the scholarship in women's history offers an important means of reconceptualizing the history of women's sport. This literature provides not only significant data and information, but most importantly a truly woman-centered perspective from which to proceed.

The essay is divided into three sections. In the first, some observations on the state of women's sport history are made. It is argued here that Nancy Struna's 1984 assessment of the literature is accurate, but that a more radical agenda for change is required than she implies. Her recommendations that we revise the conception of sport as male, masculine, and modern and explore other areas of women's history are central to this. In the second section, the development of the "new" women's history of the 1970s is briefly described and particular note is made of the conceptual work of Gerda Lerner and Joan Kelly-Gadol. The final section focuses on how one central issue, periodization, might be re-thought in order to make it more consonant with women's sporting experiences and suggests that others, notably categories of analysis and theories of change must also be tackled. The work of Patricia Vertinsky and Jan Todd are acknowledged as signalling that an important new phase in the development of the scholarship has been reached. In addressing such issues as menstruation, sexuality, and female physicality, they focus upon matters which should be central to the history of women's sport. The essay concludes with a plea for a new scholarship in women's sport history, one which proceeds from women's experiences and which places women at its center.