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## ***Sporting Women in the Public Gaze:*** **Who Wants to Talk about Aging Women?**

While elderly women athletes have always offered a barometer of what is possible in physical aging their feats have largely been ignored by the public gaze. Indeed the concept of the vigorously active and sportive older woman has been seen as an oxymoron in a number of Western societies where popularly held stereotypes of gender and aging have limited her real and perceived opportunities for pursuing strenuous sporting activities. As more and more women are running in, and into later life, it is useful to consider the historical barriers which have hindered their sporting progress and to draw comparisons across cultures and nations to better understand the context and determination of attitudes toward elderly women at sport.

The International Year of Older Persons (1999) recently celebrated the diversity among aging populations and advance new perspectives on aging such as the concept of empowerment, including positive attitudes toward leisure and sport for the elderly. Yet

historical studies on the aging process remain very underrepresented in gerontological discourse, impoverishing the developing archeology of knowledge about aging-to borrow from Foucault. My discussion here explores the demographic transformation of the twentieth century in the developed world, the feminization of old age, and changing attitudes toward aging and exercise for women in Western societies. I draw mainly upon historical examples in America and Britain and engage my international colleagues in a comparative discussion, locating the disciplining of old age through gerontological and medical discourse in a variety of contexts, exploring different understanding of the meanings of old age, and examining methods of visual imagery such as photography which might be used by sport historians interested in teaching about the sporting landscape of old age.