

J.A. Mangan (ed.), *Proceedings of the Second Annual Conference of the British Society of Sports History*, Chester College 1984. pp.84.

The papers presented around the theme of 'Women, Sport and History' demonstrate that over time sport has helped change the image, status and even the shape of women.

Sheila Fletcher's essay covering the past century of women's physical education in England shows that such specialist training was exclusive to females before the 1930s, but that once men also entered the field there was an ideological split on gender lines with women favouring the aesthetic and men more the strength and stamina aspects. Moreover, as local authorities took over the previously autonomous private colleges, the view prevailed that physical education should attain academic respectability which gave the leadership of the subject to academically qualified committeemen.

Jennifer Hargraves points out that the formative years of women's sport were contradictory in that, although sport liberated women by bringing them into more physical activity, it also acted as a restriction by forcing them to demonstrate that sport and femininity were not incompatible.

Paul Atkinson in a blinkered approach uses evidence of varying quality from both Britain and North America to support his assertion that "a woman's education in the last century was one contentious social issue which was treated largely through medical ideologies". Roberta Park in an extensively documented piece also crosses the Atlantic to demonstrate how pervasive were British, especially English, values on, and attitudes towards, sport and gender.

Finally, Jim Riordan considers sport as an agent for the social emancipation of women. To the reviewer this was the most stimulating paper, though this does not infer that it was either the best researched or even adequately footnoted. It raised many issues even if it could not answer them all. It showed an awareness of socio-historical change, for example, by pointing out that if Nelli Kim's grandmother had appeared in public in a leotard she would have faced stoning not adulation. It also questioned the degree of emancipation wrought by sport in western society by noting the differential representation of black and white women in British and United States athletic teams.

Two general conclusions can be drawn. On the positive side, it is becoming clear that female performance and participation in sport is much more a function of social custom than of biology or genetics. On the negative side it is also apparent that much of the debate regarding gender and sport rests on insecure foundations. The factual history of female sport has not been adequately researched: quite simply even the chronology is still imprecisely documented.

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