Recognizing and Expanding Our Commitment to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

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Women and girls have traditionally been underrepresented in research conducted in sport and physical activity settings (Cowley et al., 2021; Forsyth & Roberts, 2019). In addition, recent research has documented a gender bias in the review process, where research conducted with females was less likely to be recommended for publication compared with research conducted with males, even though no differences were perceived in rigor (Murrar et al., 2021). These issues are certainly not new, and may have been recognized by Marlene Adrian, who founded the Women in Sport and Physical Activity Journal (WSPAJ) in 1992. In her inaugural editorial, she noted her hope that WSPAJ would become “a stimulus for the advancement of knowledge and the facilitation of enhanced and increased opportunities for girls and women to enjoy and benefit from sports and other physical activities” (Ladda, 2014, p. 4), would have reviewers and an editorial board who embraced this mission, and would encourage international perspectives.

The journal continues to serve this purpose. Authors share their work to advance the knowledge by exploring the benefits (e.g., Elbe et al., 2016; Roethlisberger et al., 2020) and disadvantages (e.g., Kerr et al., 2020) of sport and physical activity participation for women and girls, the barriers that limit their participation (e.g., Ayala et al., 2021; Roper, 2016), the programming needed to develop health and well-being (e.g., Adams & Gill, 2015; Sobrero et al., 2017) and enhance performance (e.g., Dow et al., 2019; Perko et al., 2015), and systemic issues that limit involvement at all organizational levels within sport and exercise organizations (e.g., Kane & LaVoi, 2018), to name just a few. The journal has also published scholarly work that has centered the experiences of women in sport and exercise across identities (e.g., Armstrong, 2007; Semerjian & Cohen, 2006; Welch et al., 2021), lifespan (e.g., Di Brezzo et al., 2002; Ryan, 2006), and culture (e.g., Nakamura, 2002; Rathanaswami et al., 2016) stemming from a variety of disciplinary perspectives and methodological approaches. The journal continues to encourage an international perspective and representation. For example, WSPAJ volume 29 (April and October 2021 issues) provides insight into the experiences of women from a variety of countries, and its authors are associated with institutions in the United States of America (32), United Kingdom (18), Australia (5), Poland (5), Canada (3), Ireland (1), Luxembourg (1), and New Zealand (1).

Thus, WSPAJ, which has a majority of its editorial board and reviewers who are women and focus on work related to the mission, has continued to support scholars in advancing the understanding of women in sport and physical activity by publishing their work, recruiting quality reviewers and editorial board members committed to the work, highlighting conference proceedings in this area (e.g., Farnsworth et al., 2021; Forsyth et al., 2021), and sharing this work via social media (@ WSPAJ).

The WSPAJ editorial board also honors quality work shared with the journal during a calendar year with the Diane Gill Paper of the Year Award (e.g., Voelker & Reel, 2020) and the Erin Reifsteck Student Paper of the Year Award (e.g., Vaccaro & Butryn, 2020).

Expanding Our Commitment to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

While WPSAJ is structured to provide space for scholars to share research focused on understanding the experiences of women, often with a feminist lens (e.g., developing inclusive strategies, advocating for social justice to reduce barriers and promote physical activity, identifying power structures that limit participation across organizational levels), and provide an opportunity to mentor and support scholars in the field, there is still a need to expand our commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion. A cursory review of the article titles of the journal from 1992 through 2020 revealed that only 3% of articles identified a focus on race/ethnicity, 6% investigated individuals from countries outside of the United States, and 5% focused on the experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning, intersex, and asexual individuals. Fewer articles identified disability (1%), socioeconomic status (0.07%), or age (0.05%) in the titles. Therefore, our understanding of all girls and women in sport and physical activity is still in need of investigation. There is also no demographic data to share regarding the diversity of the authors who have published in the journal or the reviewers. Therefore, as has been repeatedly noted in articles reported in WSPAJ, there is a need for organizational change (e.g., LaVoi et al., 2019).

One area of change is to advocate for intersectional research. Crenshaw (1989) first defined intersectionality by describing the need for the legal community to recognize the intersections between race and gender. Scholars in a variety of disciplines embraced the need to explore intersections. In sport and exercise psychology, for example, Hall (2001) noted the various experiences that women of color had in sport, and advocated for researchers to study the intersections of gender, race, and class from a holistic perspective. While intersectional work has occurred, researchers and practitioners still do not have an understanding of the experiences of all women. Furthermore, as LaVoi et al. (2019) noted in reviewing women’s experiences in sport coaching, exploring these intersections is critical to unraveling systemic oppression.
The superfecta of hostility—sexism, homophobia, misogyny, and racism—provide a rich lens by which to examine women’s experiences. In other words, coaching experiences are not the same for all women. Intersectionality impacts the psychosocial and occupational outcomes of some women and their career trajectories more acutely than others; however, without more research focused on women who possess multiple and systemic marginalization, we do not know enough about how and to what degree. (p. 138)

Therefore, scholars do need to consider how multiple intersecting identities (e.g., gender and race/ethnicity; or gender, physical ability, and socioeconomic status; or sex, gender identity, and age) influence the experiences of women and girls in sport and physical activity, how these identities are formed within different sociocultural contexts, and how power and privilege impact the results of the study based on intersecting identities. Therefore, WSPAJ invites authors to submit research that is intersectional in content, methodology, and analysis, and encourages reviewers to review all research with an eye toward identifying gaps in equity, diversity, and inclusion.

The demographic representation of women within studies has also limited understanding of the experience of all women. As Henrich et al. (2010) noted, psychological research is WEIRD, that is, White, educated, industrialized, rich, and democratic. Furthermore, we do not have enough quantitative data regarding the collective experiences of subgroups of women (e.g., What are the general physical activity patterns of women with disabilities? What are the preferred exercise interventions of women from a variety of race/ethnic groups? How do training loads of women athletes shift across their lifespan?). Therefore, authors submitting a manuscript to WSPAJ will be asked to elaborate upon participant demographics describing at least the age, gender, race/ethnicity, physical ability, and location of their sample. When these demographics are not included and/or samples are not representative of the population, researchers will be encouraged to include this as a limitation of their study and discuss the need for more diverse samples. WSPAJ also invites scholarly work that provides population-level data for subgroups of women related to a variety of sport and physical activity settings. Furthermore, as more scholars venture into conducting research with diverse populations, WSPAJ asks authors to review the APA Race and Ethnicity Guidelines in Psychology (American Psychological Association, APA Task Force on Race and Ethnicity Guidelines in Psychology, 2019) and other guiding documents to assist with planning, conducting, and reporting of their research as well as to consider how their work can incorporate more proximal factors (e.g., racial identity). In addition, authors should adhere to the use of bias-free language as outlined in the APA Publication Manual (American Psychological Association, 2020) and augmented in their online resources (https://apastyle.apa.org/style-grammar-guidelines/bias-free-language). However, as language and identities continue to evolve and participants advocate for preferred documentation of their identities, authors, reviewers, and editorial board members will continue to educate one another.

To make progress on diversity, equity, and inclusion, Smith and Jamieson (2017) remind us that we must acknowledge and understand the historical role scientific racism played in the field of kinesiology and how certain histories were left untold. They recommend that as a field we need to critically examine our current history and unearth these untold stories so that current history can “reconcile itself with its past in order to be its best self in the future” (p. 175). One way the journal can support this process is by encouraging praxis-oriented research to share the voices and experiences of marginalized groups. With this in mind, WSPAJ will launch a Special Series entitled, Engaging Conversation in Women’s Sport and Physical Activity: Traversing Generations. The Special Series “will explore a range of cross-generational framings, understandings, and visions for sport and physical activity that excavates, recognizes, critiques, and celebrates contributions and experiences of women across diverse and intersectional identities, including generational differences” (see WSPAJ call for abstracts associated with this Special Series at—https://journals.humankinetics.com/fileasset/WSPAJ_CFP_Engaging_Conversations.pdf). The series will feature two articles across the next four issues of the journal.

While addressing systemic oppression includes making changes in the processes associated with the journal (i.e., changes in policies, creating inclusive practices associated with types of submissions), it also involves taking a look at the power structures. Currently, no data exist that provides insight into who publishes and who reviews for WSPAJ. While WSPAJ does have a somewhat diverse editorial board, the diversity of its members needs to be expanded. WSPAJ commits to being more transparent in this process and will begin by inviting individuals interested in reviewing or becoming a member of the editorial board to complete this form (https://forms.gle/phAncFGfuUu7FB3r6).

**Conclusion**

Overall, WSPAJ has contributed to diversity, equity, and inclusion in the sport and physical activity setting related to gender. However, as the United States of America has grappled with a racial reckoning and the disproportionate effects of the pandemic, the WSPAJ editorial board has been mindful of how we are maintaining and elevating the mission of WSPAJ. Furthermore, from a cultural humility lens there is a need for continual self-reflection and critique, adjustments in power imbalances, and the development of partnerships to advocate for change (Cervantesa & Clark, 2020; Tervalon & Murray-Garcia, 1998). A current analysis and critique of the journal highlights the fact that more needs to be done to support diversity, equity, and inclusion. The steps outlined in this editorial and enumerated below provide a good first step:

(a) Invite authors to submit intersectional research to the journal and encourage both authors and reviewers to consider how power and privilege impact the results of the study based on the demographics of the participants.

(b) Ask authors submitting a manuscript to elaborate upon participant demographics describing at least the age, gender, race/ethnicity, physical ability, and location of their sample to more fully inform the readership of the generalizability of the findings. When these demographics are not included and/or samples are not representative of the population, researchers will include this as a limitation of their study and discuss the need for more diverse samples.

(c) Invite authors to submit scholarly work that provides population-level data for subgroups of women related to a variety of sport and physical activity settings.

(d) Request that authors review the APA Race and Ethnicity Guidelines in Psychology (American Psychological Association, APA Task Force on Race and Ethnicity Guidelines in Psychology, 2019) to assist with planning, conducting, and reporting of their research. In addition, remind authors to...
adhere to the use of bias-free language as outlined in the APA Publication Manual (American Psychological Association, 2020). Furthermore, seek to educate one another as language and identities evolve.

(e) Launch a Special Series entitled, Engaging Conversation in Women’s Sport and Physical Activity: Traversing Generations, to share the voices and experiences of marginalized groups (https://journals.humankinetics.com/fileasset/WSPAJ_CFP_Engaging_Conversations.pdf).

(f) Invite individuals who may expand our intellectual diversity to become a reviewer or member of the editorial board to complete this form (https://forms.gle/phAncFGfuU7F8Br6).

In moving forward, it is inevitable that mistakes will be made along the way and additional learning will be needed. In addition, further critique will be needed internally among the board members and externally by our authors, reviewers, and readership. I encourage you to reach out to the WSPAJ editorial board to let us know how we can improve and continue the journey toward greater cultural humility that will further our purpose in advancing the knowledge and enhancing opportunities for all girls and women to engage in sport and physical activities.

References


