Letter from the Editor: Celebrating SSJ’s 40th Anniversary

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This year marks the 40th anniversary of the Sociology of Sport Journal (SSJ). It is a great honor to serve as editor of the journal as we celebrate this momentous achievement for both the journal and the field of sociology of sport. We would not be here today if it were not for the leadership, vision, and dedication of our past editors and so I would like to offer a special thank you to Jay Coakley (Founding Editor: 1984–1989), Peter Donnelly (1990–1994), Cynthia Hasbrook (1995–1998), Christopher Stevenson (1999–2001), Nancy Theberge (2002–2004), Annemiek Knoppers (2005–2008), Pirko Markula (2009–2011), Michael Atkinson (2012–2014), and Michael D. Giardina (2015–2020). I also wish to acknowledge the past-associate editors, editorial board members, and all our anonymous reviewers without whom the journal would not be where it is today. And of course, thank you to all the authors who submit their manuscripts to SSJ and to all the scholars who read and cite the papers we publish. It is because of our vibrant community of engaged and committed scholars that we are able to celebrate this achievement!

Anniversaries provide an opportunity to reflect on the past, take stock of where we are, and imagine what the future may hold. At the November 2021 NASSS meeting, held in April 2022 in Montréal, Canada, the editorial board considered ways to mark the anniversary. The team at Human Kinetics and I also discussed how we might celebrate SSJ’s 40 years. I am pleased to announce the outcomes of those conversations. The first of which has already launched: new cover art for the journal. The cover art was developed in collaboration with the associate editors and the Human Kinetics team. I hope the cover art offers a visual representation of the mission and scope of the journal. Thank you to everyone involved, including Tammy Miller and Keri Evans at Human Kinetics for their efforts. Thank you also to the Associate Editors, Rachel Allison, Daniel Burdsey, Joseph Cooper, Audrey Giles, Shannon Jette, and Yuka Nakamura for their insight and input on the design.

In addition to a ‘new look,’ we also celebrate with a special issue of the journal titled “Futures—Past: Liberation, Futurity, Intersectionality, and Interdisciplinarity: Reading Sport, Physical Culture, and the (Physically Active) Body,” tentatively scheduled for publication in the December 2023 issue. The special issue is edited by a group of emerging scholars who represent the diversity of scholarship and thought that characterizes the futures of SSJ and the sociology of sport: Dr. Letisha Engracia Cardoso Brown, University of Cincinnati, USA; Dr. Chen Chen, University of Connecticut, USA; Dr. Tomika Ferguson, Virginia Commonwealth University, USA; Dr. Courtney Sztch, Queens University, Canada; Dr. Anthony Jean Weems, Florida International University, USA; and Dr. Natalie Welch, Seattle University, USA. I wish to thank each of them for their leadership and commitment to serving the journal as guest editors. It is our goal that the special issue reflects the directions in which field is moving and offers an opportunity for the sociology of sport community to critically reflect on both its history and its future. The list of possible topics outlined in the call for papers offers insight on how this group of emerging scholars envisions the futures—past of the field. Topics include the histories of race/ethnicity and intersectionality covered within the last 40 years of SSJ; discussions of media and political discourse(s) over the past 40 years in relation to race, gender, class, nation, and/or other modalities; the development of women’s professional sport over the past 40 years; Euro-American centricism, Anglophone hegemony, and the politics of knowledge production in the sociology of sport; the environmental impact of sporting mega-events; political economy, athletic labor, and Marxist sociology of sport; the futures/pasts/present realities of athlete activism; critical pedagogy and methodologies; settler-colonialism, decolonization, and Indigenous resurgence; the consequences of attacks against bodily autonomy (e.g., Roe v. Wade, anti-trans participation bans) on athletic participation and overall human rights; and alternative and/or noncapitalist modes of organizing sport and physical culture. The guest editors have received many submissions already, and I am excited to see the special issue come to fruition.

In terms of reflecting on our past, if you have been to SSJ’s website you will notice there is a new tab called “Virtual Special Issues.” The tab includes the “Top 40 at 40” and features the 10 most-cited manuscripts from each decade (i.e., the 1980s, 1990s, 2000s, and 2010s). Throughout the year, scholars will be invited to comment on the continued significance of the article and what has changed in the time since it was published. All the articles are available and permanently free to read on the SSJ website. A special thank you to Human Kinetics for helping to make the impactful research accessible and available to students, scholars, and the public.

Another way to reflect on our past is to recognize the North American Society for the Sociology of Sport (NASSS) “Outstanding SSJ Article” award winners. The first award was conferred in 1993 and by 2001, the award was given annually. According to NASSS documents, the award recognizes the article published in SSJ that makes a “significant contribution to the scholarship of sport sociology.” In the coming months, the SSJ website will include a list and hyperlinks of the articles that received the award. The goal is to create a space within the journal’s website to acknowledge the innovative and influential research published in the journal and to provide scholars, both those inside and outside of NASSS, an easy way to locate the award-winning articles.
My hope is that we will celebrate throughout the year, including organized special sessions at the NASSS meetings in New Orleans in November focused on the anniversary special issue topics. I look forward to collaborating with the guest editors and members of the Editorial Board to organize those sessions. Be sure to follow SSJ on social media for updates and events. Until then, please join me in wishing SSJ a happy 40th anniversary. Here is to the next 40 years! Cheers!