Envisioning the Expansion and Continuity of the Cross-Generational Conversation in Women’s Sport and Physical Activity

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Never-Ending “Herstory” in Sport and Physical Activity

This journey began with a goal of seeking to illuminate intersectional, cross-generational, globally-informed dialogues and analyses of girls and women in sport and physical activity. With that in mind, the review team manifested what this series attempted to achieve at the call for papers and the introduction paper in Volume 30. The team sought to uncover previously hidden or under examined histories in the evolution of physical activity and sport for girls and women and to recognize and connect early career and emergent scholars in establishing spaces for girls and women in sports with new ways of envisioning our futures. Eventually, through careful and timely analytic dialogues of a broad spectrum of experiences in sports and physical activities, it is our expectation that this special series serves as a meaningful platform to better understand and enhance the lives of girls and women and encourage people to envision more equitable sporting spaces.

Reflective of these scholarly and practical aims, the call for papers secured responses from seven different countries on topics that have not yet been addressed in the Women in Sport and Physical Activity Journal (WSPAJ). Working distinctively and collaboratively across two volumes guided by a call for papers that had been vetted and approved by the WSPAJ editorial board, the team has been humbled and inspired by the depth and range of analyses. To put it succinctly, we are ignorant by virtue of seldom hearing about Brazilian or South Korean sport culture, or the lives of Black activist women in sport, or coach educational journeys in the United Kingdom, or women’s empowerment in New Zealand, or the sport participation and community program desires of Black Canadian women. As well, the invitation for cross-generational conversations produced a multilayered response across all submissions, with authors reflexively recognizing the cross-generational strengths of their team, or some authors responding to previous literature with a new analytic lens, or some bringing previously erased histories into view in ways that begin to fill in historical erasures as well as inform current generations of athlete activists. Indeed, these responses serve as a reminder that it is vital to create intellectually provocative, methodologically diverse, transnational, cross-racial, and cross-generational spaces for conversation where marginalized and segregated voices can be heard and shared which is often uncommon in our academic work.

Contribution in This Special Series

Following the lead-off article by Haggar and Giles (2022) focusing on community sport participation of second-generation African Canadian adolescent girls, this volume, again, provides a meaningful and captivating story about girls and women in sport and physical activity building on solid and skillful analysis. “Roots of Resistance: The Origins of the Black Women in Sport Foundation and the Politics of Race and Gender,” by Raja Malikah Rahim and Rita Liberti uncovers rich individual and interconnected stories of four Black women, Tina Sloan Green, Nikki Franke, Alpha Alexander, and Linda Greene, who founded the Black Women in Sport Foundation in 1992 in the United States. By giving special attention to the experiences of young Black women who lived prior to the passage of Title IX, which led them to successful careers and the establishment of the Black Women in Sport Foundation, Rahim and Liberti (2023) shed light on the early struggles and successes faced by women and girls in sport and society. Their choice of oral history narratives as a methodology effectively captures and conveys the vivid voices of the four women who navigated and negotiated the ideologies of racism and sexism from childhood to adulthood. Rahim and Liberti (2023) not only remind us of the significant presence of these four crucial Black female leaders in sport but also illuminate how their continued impact and legacy have shaped the lives and experiences of a diverse network of women and girls spanning multiple communities, nations, and generations.

In concert with Haggar and Giles (2022), Rahim and Liberti (2023) offer WSPAJ readers an example of deep scholarship rooted in critical dialogue and cross-generational lived experience, and reflective of multidimensional impacts on the lives of all women in sport and physical activity. Through these two, unique and timely analyses, readers are invited to imagine eras, spaces, and places that both hold histories and are history in the making. In content and methodology, each manuscript in the special series issues an ongoing invitation to WSPAJ readers and future authors—an invitation to newly consider and intentionally link the vast contexts, experiences, and diversity of women in sport and physical activity.

For More Hidden Voices

At the risk of being overly self-referent, the way the review team came together was intentional and expansive in itself—admittedly heavy on the social sciences, yet incredibly diverse in analytic foci,
methodological practice, and application of knowledge. Serving on this special series team and reading and reviewing this set of responses to the call for papers meant that we had an intellectual space for diverse dialogues across races, generations, and multiple categories of difference, and further, we reaffirmed that such conditions need to be more expanded and ensured for each individual in their academic endeavors. Environments such as this, that cultivate dynamic conversations encompassing diverse contexts and experiences, are well-situated to facilitate the expansion and transformation of theoretical and methodological approaches for analysis. Furthermore, it is these intentional conditions that enable scholars to defy and unsettle colonial power and White centrality in academia culturally, politically, and linguistically, toward an authentic embrace of more BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) leadership. We aspire for the work presented in this special series to serve as a catalyst, inspiring continued involvement in truly critical, intersectional, and decolonial analyses of girls and women in sport and physical activities.

Toward this end, we share three observed trends in the work on this special series as they seem to represent change we all need to make in order to produce scholarship that unveils “more hidden voices.” The three trends are efficiently referred to as disciplinary boundaries, institutional vulnerabilities, and need for community. To reiterate, the response to this call for papers was vastly diverse in content, authorship, and methodology—an intellectually provocative gift for any review team. Throughout the back-and-forth communication with authors, it became clear that WSPAJ draws on scholarship from a broad array of disciplines that can be enriching and capacious, and can also be divisive and myopic. In the response to this call for papers, the danger of holding, uncritically, to disciplinary boundaries was most observable in the core challenge of putting issues into dialogue with shifting moments, other issues, different analytic framings, and so on. To be clear, the review team always read this as a challenge of our time, not any sense that the scholarship itself was lacking. Second, WSPAJ has a strength as a professional writing entry or transition point for many authors. In responses to this call for papers, that career positionality seemed to be related to a careful negotiation around what counts as scholarship. To the extent our team observed authorial investments in previous explanations, prior methodological framings, and difficulty in trusting one’s own, emergent framing, we wondered “How did we get to this place?”

The weight of institutional vulnerability for approaching scholarship “differently” coupled with the dangers of conversing across disciplinary boundaries moved our team even more firmly toward an investment in building community. As Peña (2022) describes in Community as Rebellion, students and faculty need to learn how to create community now, and must be willing to create community-informed forms of accompaniment throughout these journeys toward new knowledge projects. The decidedly modest number of publications in this special series speaks directly to the original intention in the call for papers to invite something different, something that draws our commitments together in new ways. It is clear that the academy is not necessarily good at supporting our desires to exact change (Ahmed, 2012), and as scholars in this academy, we may have much more work to do in creating the intellectual communities we need (Peña, 2022) in order to focus on the more hidden voices of women in sport and physical activity.

References


