

## Book Review

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*Feminism and Sporting Bodies: Essays on Theory and Practice* .By: M. Ann Hall (1996). Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics, 134 pages, \$22.00.

In *Feminism and Sporting Bodies: Essays on Theory and Practice*, M. Ann Hall takes us through her own research odyssey, and in doing so she takes us through the development of feminist research in sport. It is a journey which many of us are also taking, but are able to communicate much less articulately than does Hall. The essays are written with a subtle humor of self-reflection which can be done only by those who openly and honestly think back on their personal journeys. While this book is Hall's history, it is indeed a history of the development of feminist analysis of sport.

*Feminism and Sporting Bodies* has much to offer. It is not a lengthy book, but that is one of its strong points. Readers who are not conversant in the theories and approaches of feminism and feminist cultural studies of sport have the opportunity to gain a salient overview without having to immerse themselves in lengthy writings on the subject, which are often understandable only to those who are already conversant with the theoretical perspectives.

The first of six essays is entitled "Research Odyssey of a Feminist." With this chapter Hall sets the stage for the rest of the book by starting with her own roots in psychology and positivism. Included in this chapter are what Hall defines as two major insights which led her to change paths during the 1970's. One was that "social psychological research, with its

emphasis on sex roles and sex identity, not only demanded a substantive critique but was potentially harmful because it continued to perpetuate the very stereotypes we wished to eradicate" (p. 7). The second major insight was that since for most radical theorists, the major form of domination was class, it would be difficult to get radical theorists to see that their theories did not consider the importance of gender.

Chapter 2 ("From Categorical to Relational Research") contains a discussion of three levels of analysis of gender and sport: categorical research, distributive research, and relational analyses. Categorical research about women in sport has as a primary focus the quantification of sex differences in performance, participation, and abilities. This research generally is an attempt to locate any sex/gender differences in biology or socialization. Distributive research is centered on the distribution of resources with a corresponding focus on inequality. The third of the levels of analysis is relational analysis. Relational analysis starts from the assumption that "sporting practices are historically produced, socially constructed, and culturally defined to serve the interests and needs of powerful groups in society" (p. 11); understanding issues in sport requires that one understands the unequal relationships between dominant and subordinate groups. As she develops these three levels of analysis in this essay, it is important to note that whereas Hall clearly sees relational analyses as best explaining women's involvement and noninvolvement in sport, she is careful to avoid denigrating the other forms of research and analysis. In fact, it is apparent that descriptive research (based in categorical or distributive analyses) is often an important step in documenting that there is an issue to which one can apply a relational analysis. It also is important in documenting whether actions, policies, or practices have resulted in any changes.

The third chapter is entitled "The Potential of Feminist Cultural Studies." It is, in essence, a call to action. Hall bases