
Intending Women and Sport: An Interdisciplinary Perspective as a comprehensive, up-to-date compilation of the growing body of scholarship about women’s sport and recreational experiences, editors Costa and Guthrie note in the Preface that they envision the text as “a benchmark book for students, as well as scholars and researchers in the field” (p.xi). I would agree that it has much to offer interested persons in both women’s studies and sport-related fields. Moreover, it could fairly be described as the 1990’s successor to previous benchmark works on this topic, specifically Gerber, Felshin, Berlin & Wyrick’s The American Woman in Sport (Addison-Wesley, 1974) and Boutilier and SanGiovanni’s The Sporting Woman (Human Kinetics, 1983).

Women and Sport appears to borrow its overall structure from Gerber, et al (1974) in that the book is divided into major disciplinary content areas: Part I Historical and Cultural Foundations of Women’s Sport (8 chapters), Part II Biomedical Considerations (6 chapters), and Part III Psychological and Social Dimensions (8 chapters). Although this structure does provide for a multidisciplinary discussion of the topic, such traditional disciplinary-bound divisions also compartmentalizes the content in a somewhat dated way, creating a barrier to a truly integrative, transdisciplinary approach which the sub-title, “An Interdisciplinary Perspective,” implies. However, the cohesive element throughout the text is an emphasis on feminist perspective and analysis, in a pattern similar to that of Boutilier and SanGiovanni (1983). Each major section includes at least one chapter devoted to a feminist critique of disciplinary shortsightedness with regard to women, including androcentric research assumptions and methodologies which either exclude gender as a focus of study, trivialize it or use women only
as a comparison to the “norm” of men. I particularly appreciated the insightful and provocative suggestions made of ways to overcome or move beyond such limitations. In fact, I found myself applying these critiques to the content of other chapters within each section.

The anthology format adopted by the editors takes advantage of the disciplinary expertise of multiple authors (23 in all). Although this approach adds variety and diversity of perspective to the text, it also results in an overall discussion which is less coherent and more disjointed. Differences in presentation style, levels of content complexity, and depth of feminist perspective is apparent throughout. I must commend the editors, however, for providing excellent introductions to each section which did much to integrate the ideas presented within the section into a cohesive whole.

Part I Historical and Cultural Foundations of Women’s Sport

The first section is indeed ambitious in its breadth, providing an overview of women’s participation in (rather than exclusion from) sport and physical activity from ancient and medieval times to the present. In the introductory chapter, “From the History of Women in Sport to Women’s Sport History,” Catriona Parratt asserts that despite the fact that historians have begun to devote more attention to women and their sport experiences, the value of this work is limited by the acceptance of androcentric assumptions and the use of the constructs of male-dominated and male-defined scholarship. She also points to feminist historical research as using primarily a liberal feminist framework which has resulted in largely descriptive, uncritical scholarship which fails to substantively address the impact of the social construction and maintenance of gender on women’s sport experiences. Parratt concludes by urging that future historical research be grounded in feminist theory in order to explain, rather than simply document, the gendered nature of our sporting history.

In chapter 2, “Ancient and Medieval Worlds,” June Kennard and John Marshall Carter present evidence of recreational and sporting activities of girls and women in ancient Crete, Greece and Europe which, they claim, historians have typically either ignored or mis-