



TRANSFORMATIONS IN WOMEN'S SPORT ACROSS TIME AND CULTURAL BOUNDARIES

Abstract - This paper presents an overview for an hypothesis that women's liberation in sport is but one thread in the tapestry of women's sport development throughout the Americas, focusing particularly in parallels between Brazil and the United States. Motivations for women's progress had common bases in the USA and in much of Latin America, albeit the latter had to grapple with significant specificities given the upheavals it has gone through during most of the twentieth century. The consolidation of a brief overview of women's work in recent sport social psychology exposes considerable similarities between approaches of women in sport social psychology and the broader field of feminism and psychology. In women's physical education during the 1960s and early 1970s, a great deal of research and scholarly discourse was quietly transpiring concerning the psychology of gender roles in sport and the psychosocial impact of women in sport. Women's sport development in Latin America, however, was out of sight for mainstream scholars because of language barriers, even though Spanish and Portuguese are among the world's most spoken languages. The trajectory of women in sport in the region is nevertheless noteworthy. The following paper concludes that, despite last century's significant achievements and progress, sport governance and ideologies continue to construct sport as a masculine domain.

Keywords: Feminism; Women's sport studies; Women's sport; Sport social psychology

TRANSFORMAÇÕES NO ESPORTE FEMININO ATRAVÉS DO TEMPO E DAS FRONTEIRAS CULTURAIS

Resumo - Este artigo apresenta uma visão geral da hipótese de que a liberação de mulheres no esporte é apenas um fio da meada do desenvolvimento esportivo das mulheres nas Américas, concentrando-se particularmente em paralelos entre o Brasil e os Estados Unidos. As motivações para o progresso das mulheres tinham bases comuns nos EUA e em grande parte da América Latina, embora o último tivesse que lidar com especificidades significativas, dadas as perturbações pelas quais passou durante a maior parte do século XX. A consolidação de uma breve visão geral do trabalho das mulheres na recente psicologia social do esporte expõe consideráveis similaridades entre as abordagens das mulheres na psicologia social do esporte e o campo mais amplo do feminismo e da psicologia. As mulheres na educação física, durante os anos 1960 e início dos anos 1970, tiveram uma grande quantidade de pesquisas e os discursos acadêmicos foi discretamente revelador sobre a psicologia dos papéis de gênero e o impacto psicossocial das mulheres no esporte. O desenvolvimento do esporte feminino na América Latina, no entanto, estava fora da vista dos estudiosos do *mainstream* por causa das barreiras linguísticas, embora o espanhol e o português estejam entre as línguas mais faladas no mundo. A trajetória das mulheres no esporte na região é, no entanto, digna de nota. O artigo a seguir conclui que, apesar das conquistas e progressos significativos do século passado, a governança esportiva e as ideologias continuam a construir o esporte como um domínio masculino.

Palavras-chave: Feminismo; Estudos esportivos femininos; Esporte feminino; Psicologia social do esporte

LAS TRANSFORMACIONES EN EL DEPORTE DE LAS MUJERES A TRAVÉS DEL TIEMPO Y LOS LÍMITES CULTURALES

Resumen - Este documento presenta una visión general de la hipótesis de que la liberación de la mujer en el deporte no es más que un hilo en el tapiz del desarrollo deportivo de la mujer en las Américas, centrándose particularmente en los paralelos entre Brasil y los Estados Unidos. Las motivaciones para el progreso de las mujeres tenían bases comunes en los Estados Unidos y en gran parte de América Latina, aunque estas últimas tuvieron que lidiar con especificidades significativas debido a los trastornos por los que ha pasado durante la mayor parte del siglo XX. La consolidación de una breve descripción del trabajo de la mujer en la psicología social del deporte reciente expone considerables similitudes entre los enfoques de la mujer en la psicología social del deporte y el campo más amplio del feminismo y la psicología. En la educación física de las mujeres durante los años sesenta y principios de los setenta, hubo una gran cantidad de investigaciones y discursos académicos sobre la psicología de los papeles de género y el impacto psicossocial de las mujeres en el deporte. El desarrollo deportivo de las mujeres en América Latina, sin embargo, estaba fuera de la vista de los académicos principales debido a las barreras del idioma, a pesar de que el español y el portugués se encuentran entre los idiomas más hablados del mundo. Sin embargo, la trayectoria de las mujeres en el deporte en la región es notable. El siguiente documento concluye que, a pesar de los logros y avances significativos del siglo pasado, la gobernanza del deporte y las ideologías continúan construyendo el deporte como un dominio masculino.

Palabras-clave: Feminismo; Estudios deportivos para mujeres; Deporte de la mujer; Psicología social del deporte

Carole A. Oglesby

Department of
Kinesiology

Temple University
(USA)

oglesbyc1@gmail.com

[http://dx.doi.org/
10.30937/2526-
6314.v1n3.id32](http://dx.doi.org/10.30937/2526-6314.v1n3.id32)

In the lexicon of the Olympic Movement, the giant land mass from the Arctic north to the Antarctic south and encompassing hundreds of millions of people, is called 'the Americas' or the 'Pan American region'. This terminology, strangely perhaps, creates unity of a mind-boggling diversity and a host of dichotomies. A recent English language text, *Women and sport in Latin America* (2016), in revealing the women's sport trajectory in Latin America, also makes clear the many commonalities marking women's progress (or lack thereof) in the Americas. In this paper, an overview will be presented for an hypothesis that women's liberation/revolution in sport is but one thread in a tapestry of women's sport development throughout the region.

It appears the motivations for women's progress had common bases in the USA and in much of Latin America although change may have occurred somewhat earlier in the USA. As described by Lopez de D'Amico, Benn and Pfister¹ (p. 5): "[...] the history of Latin America is one of invasions, colonialism, independence and a 20th century in which many countries suffered dictatorships mostly supported by outsiders". These upheavals quite likely affected the speed of social change. The characterizations of the authors of this important text reveal the common pathways for women sport advocates in the USA and Latin America; especially Brazil. The women's movement in Latin America began in the late 19th century in Brazil, Mexico, Chile, Peru, and Argentina¹ (p. 6): "[...] in the 20th century came the fight for the right to vote, establish organizations against dictatorships, more access to education, and an end to domestic violence". Surely USA counterparts would concur completely with the Latina assessment¹ (p. 226): "Women's revolution was intended to change the way lives were lived across Latin America".

Culture "wars" are not won; they are endured and sustained. My belief stated here expresses the essence of my experiences as a sport feminist scholar across many decades. Reading women's sport science scholarship, especially in my specialty area of sport psychology, I was struck by the repetitive citations (decade by decade) that bespoke a belief, or hope, that a particular person or occurrence marked a "turning point" for women in sport - that 'the tide had turned', there was light at the end of the tunnel, and equality was in sight. Yet, here we are, late in the second decade of the 21st century, still in search of new signs. I must conclude there will be no visible end zone, finish line or final lap. Instead, what I see are "mile markers". This process of opening

sport to women, and the painstaking analysis and monitoring of progress and effects, must be understood as an unimaginably long ultra-marathon relay. It stretches back through our history and forward beyond what our eyes can see directly.

My aim in this paper was to focus on possible transformations in the phenomenon of women's sport and influential psycho-social factors and their meaning for the future. It did not seem possible to take that perspective without some consideration of the immediate past. What follows then is a brief overview of "Women's Work" in recent sport social psychology (dominantly in the USA and Brazil).

In the USA

If we ask the question, where were women's voices in sport social psychology in the 20th century, the answer must be in two parts. In the mainstream sciences of sport, the "pool of knowledge" was essentially "woman-less". Women scholars were not appearing in the mainstream journals and they were without public recognition. Women sport scholars were to be found in "Women's Physical Education Departments" and women's physical education scholarly outlets and associations. It could be thought of as a "ghetto" with some consequences that were positive but with many negatives^{2,3}. This status is seen by some as a shelter in which to try and maintain the traditional "women's way of sport" within a larger environment where it was under threat from both sides the philosophical spectrum. Women physical educators defined sport as an activity that was safe as possible from injury; educational not business-oriented, participatory rather than spectatorial, balanced not hyper specialized. To maintain such a sport model required total control by professional women physical educators who had prioritized mass sport over elite levels. Thus, the growing clamor for elite sport experiences, coming even from within their own ranks, was inexorably moving control away from women's departments and into other institutionalized realms. When the demands to accommodate the USA legal requirement called Title IX became recognized, Departments of Men's and Women's Physical Education and Athletics were almost universally merged and "women's way of sport" was swept away in a tide of male leadership and athletic equity advocates whose goals and visions were paradoxically shared to a large extent by many in the traditional Women's Physical Education establishment.

Interestingly, and not unexpectedly, many similarities can be drawn between women in sport social psychology and the picture painted by Eagly, Rose, Riger and McHugh⁴ in “Feminism and Psychology: Analysis of a Half Century of Research on Women and Gender”. They found the stereotypic beliefs/pronouncements of the Psychology establishment were hardly “nuanced”: “We must start with the realization that, as much as we might want women to be good scientists and engineers, they want first and foremost to be womanly companions to men and to be mothers”. The critiques of psychology from 2nd wave feminists were also understandably harsh: “Instead of destroying the old prejudices that restricted women's lives, social science in America merely gave them new authority” (Friedan⁵, p. 117).

Eagly et al.⁴ found that, in terms of some measures, psychology had altered in the 50 years under review. For example, in 1960, women were 17% of the PhD's produced and by 2009 this number had grown to 75%. In 1970, articles on sex differences appeared at a rate of 25-28 per 1000 while in 2009, the ratio was 64 per 1000. In Chrisler's⁶ reflection on the journal *Sex Roles's* impact through its history, she enumerated the myriad topics covered in its pages. She reported there was nothing in sport during 1975-2000 but that two such articles appeared in 2005.

What about the assertion of “women-less knowledge” in sport sciences? Evidence at this point is anecdotal but a sense of the status can be seen in a 1970 publication, which emerged as an early standard, *Contemporary Readings in Sport Psychology*, by William Morgan⁷. The text had 50 chapters and 5 women authors. Three were in the area of motor development/learning (physical education and pedagogy oriented). Another was a psychiatrist reporting mental issues of Harvard athletes (all male). The last female author was a graduate student (third author) whose thesis investigated personality characteristics of female athletes at her college. The instrument used to measure these characteristics was a common, well known, inventory; Cattell's 16 Personality Factor. Not surprisingly, among the findings was a familiar one to feminist sport psychology scholars; the women athletes reported higher “masculinity” scores which were normative. Anyone with contemporary psychometric awareness realizes that such scores in an active, achievement- oriented, competitive milieu are completely predictable but problematic for sport science-oriented advocates

nonetheless. All these contributions, while expert, were marginalized at best and exemplary of the period

With the realization that feminist, women-centered sensibilities were not being represented in the mainstream Physical Education/Kinesiology outlets, a few scholars made a new pathway through independent publications. Dorothy Harris, a professor at Penn State, was able to direct a national research conference focused on women's questions, issues, and concerns. The entire Proceedings⁸ were published by Penn State University. It was a land mark work crossing over all of the emerging sub disciplines of Kinesiology including Exercise Physiology, Biomechanics, Motor Learning and Development, History and Philosophy as well as Sport Psychology. Its holistic strength made it difficult to "classify" as to home base, which may, paradoxically, have weakened its impact.

In the same year, a well-known athlete academician published a book exploring female identity in the athletic milieu⁹. It was, what we might describe today as, an idiographic, qualitative, single case analysis. In 1972 there were really no words to describe it as a "scholarly work" and it was not widely cited.

In 1974, four well respected academics published a text book through Addison-Wesley, a publishing company well known in Kinesiology communities. Ellen Gerber, Jan Felshin, Pearl Berlin and Wayneen Wyrick¹⁰, authors of *The American Woman in Sport*, presented four extensive and well documented essays in sport history-philosophy, sociology, sport psychology and exercise psychology.

In 1978, an edited anthology was published by Lea & Febiger, *Women and Sport; from Myth to Reality*¹¹. This text featured chapters by an established sport historian and Wilma Scott Heide, the 2nd President of NOW, a feminist visionary. The other 12 scholars, writing in the areas of sport science, sport psychology and sociology, law and public policy, were young and dedicated academicians. The ensuing years have seen them all flourish and prove their mettle including Irene Frieze, Maureen McHugh, Susan Birrell, Susan Greendorfer, and Mary Duquin. An important by-product of this work may have been a realization that "women's studies" in sport could be a desirable and productive launch-point for a scholarly career rather than a "dead end" or the sidebar of an academic dilettante.

Yet another possible sign of the building of somewhat tenuous ties between women in psychology and sport psychology was the 1979 *Psychology Today* article¹², titled “Femininity on the Line”. The cover picture was a well worn baseball glove (complete with Rawling brand) with a slender hand holding a baseball with familiar two fingers across the seam. Perhaps a curve ball was coming you might think except the two fingers were exceptionally well manicured and the nails featured perfectly applied tomato-red nail polish; all planned to be jarring I would guess. The article interior also sported a full page, color shot of an attractive women camouflaged in a football uniform, including shoulder pads, and a slightly over-sized helmet; unclasped and slightly askew. She had black under liner for her eyes (playing in bright sun) and a teeth-clenched snarl on her bright lipstick smile. The author, a psychiatrist with Harvard Medical School and Massachusetts General Hospital (or perhaps only the *Psychology Today* editorial staff) presented a model of mixed metaphor.

Despite the tongue-in-cheek visuals, the article itself was replete with groundbreaking, stereotype-busting citations. The article opens with the then-familiar chant that women in sport invokes “role conflict” and threats to femininity along with the masculinization of the body. Studies were cited utilized the Bem Sex Role Inventory with sport affirmed as providing an “androgynous advantage” freeing women to better develop the “instrumental aspects” of self. Rohrbaugh¹² may have been the first to emphasize a theme more common today. She described that the authors of *The Managerial Woman* interviewed the top 100 ‘Best placed American business women’ and found all identified themselves as “tom boys” in a youth participating in whatever sports were available to them.

Thus, in women's physical education during the 1960s and early 1970s, a great deal of research and scholarly discourse was quietly transpiring concerning the psychology of gender roles in sport and the psychosocial impact of women in sport.

A crucial feature, lost in what was perceived as gender warfare as men's and women's departments were forced to merge, was a deep divide in philosophy and research methodology within the sport sciences¹³. The men's departments were leading the way towards mechanistic, exclusively quantitative and narrow focused sub discipline work. The women's organizations were striving to maintain holistic/humanistic, often qualitative, approaches within a unified Kinesiology. The

psychology theorists at the heart of women's scholarly work were Gesell, Piaget, Jourard, Rogers, Kelly, Kuhn, Tart, Watzlawick and feminist scholars such as Mead, Sherif, Bern, Weisstein, Maccoby, and Spence, to name but a few.

A few notable cross overs between women in psychology and sport psychology began to appear in the literature of the decades of the 1970s and early 1980s. Carolyn Sherif, was a colleague of Dorothy Harris, and presented at the 1972 research conference at Penn State. She had already been published in a DGWS Research Report¹⁴ but this would have been an example of an outlet really only accessed by women physical educators.

Mary Duquin, a contributor to the *Myth to Reality* text¹¹, had been influenced by Bem at Stanford and both she and Oglesby pounced on the Bem Sex Role Inventory as a way to dis-engage research on women athletes from the personality factor “forced choice” between adjectives classified as masculine and those classified as feminine. In the BSRI, study participants could choose one self - description and another; athletes were highly ‘androgynous’ in orientation (high in affirming both typically masculine and feminine adjectives). Janet Spence's work on gender identity was also highly useful to women sport psychology scholars. Maccobey's work on the psychology of sex differences, Gilligan's re-formulation of the path of moral development and Horners's reformation of the initial work on achievement motivation were applied in the programs of innumerable sport feminist scholars to explore conceptual possibilities that “sport” was not (by nature) a singularly ‘masculine’ experience but one that might be conceptualized in a different “women's way”. Chrisler's⁶ essay, however, would suggest that the tidal flow of information between women in psychology and women in sport social psychology may have been decidedly ‘one-way’.

Latin America and Brazil

Women's sport development in Latin America has been shrouded from the view of mainstream scholars in a manner similar to progress in the USA but with the added difficulty of issues rooted in isolation based on language. One of the main purposes of the recent English language text was the mitigation of the isolation based on language¹. This isolation is quite paradoxical since Spanish is the second most widely spoken native language in the world and Portuguese is the sixth most spoken language. The use

of Spanish and Portuguese in common academic discourse has resulted in a partial unfamiliarity with the scholarship of Latin America among the broader scientific world¹ (p. 3).

In the same patterns that exist globally, the practitioners of girls and women's sport in Latin America have faced prejudice and discrimination. Yet, the accomplishments have been notable. The first Latin American women to participate in the Olympic Games were in 1932 in Los Angeles. The first gold medal went to a Cuban woman in 1980. The Cuban women's volleyball team won three gold medals in a row¹ (p. 9). The first Pan American Games were in 1951 and women were included as participants from the beginning. Today, women are 45% of the Pan American Games participants.

The Lopez de D'Amico¹ text features separate chapters on ten Latin American countries with the excellent chapter on Brazil prepared by Rubio, Altmann, Mourao, and Goeller¹⁵. I wish to mention brief highlights from this chapter so that all may see the many parallels with progress noted in the USA.

Sport sociologists and sport psychologists have emphasized over time that sport embodies national character¹⁶. Rubio et al make clear that Brazilian sport honors perseverance, facing life challenges and choosing to make a difference with one's life. They go on to emphasize that the origins of modern sport participation are linked to family-based elite Clubs and immigrant associations. The democratization of girls and women's sport was also initiated by school sport, but access was still limited. Brazilian sport was impacted by views of females in other social sectors including, what Rubio et al.¹⁶ (p. 71) referred to as, 'fair sex ideologies' prejudice, discrimination and similar prohibitions as seen in North America. Progress was made all the more difficult in that: "Brazil did not have the same level of support for challenging and demystifying negative stereotypes as was seen in the USA".

Through the 1930's, Brazilian women gained the right to vote (paralleling so-called 1st wave feminism in the USA) and fashion changes opened new possibilities for women in sport. There was a setback, however, from 1941 (laws passed prohibiting females from boxing, football, baseball, weight lifting, water polo) until 1979 when the prohibitions were technically lifted¹⁶.

The Olympic boycotts of 1980 and 1984 opened the way for successes for Brazilian women. The gender gap on Brazilian teams was closed a bit with 13% in 1980, 14% in 1984 and 25% in Barcelona, 1992. The Games in 1996 featured the first medals by Brazilian women and marvelous successes: Gold in Beach Volleyball, Silver in Basketball, Bronze in Volleyball. In Beijing the percentage of women was 48% and medals included Gold in Volleyball, Long Jump; Silver in Football; Bronze in Judo, Taekwondo and Sailing.

Given the Brazilian love of Football, or perhaps linked to its association with men, women were banned from play in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s but in 1980s women's teams began to be formed including a national team in 1988. This lengthy ban still has effects including in media coverage, organizational infrastructure and funding. Yet, the National Women's Team has enjoyed great success especially in the South American Championships winning five of six times¹⁶ (p. 72): "There are still huge challenges for women in management, coaching, officiating and journalism...Football is discursively embedded in Brazilian national identity and is a space for women to conquer".

Conclusion

Perhaps a sound way to conclude this paper is to recount selected key findings of the 2010 publication¹⁷ in which a review was provided of sport publications in Sex Roles between 1975-2010. Knoppers and McDonald¹⁷ observed that 22 articles with sport themes were published in the initial 25 years of SR with 53 papers in the last ten years. Their general conclusions were as follows:

1. Much of the content of the articles dealt with countering stereotypes centered on;
2. The notion that sport has a detrimental effect on women; that women were 'masculinized' by sport participation. On the contrary, female athletes were found to be psychologically healthy;
3. Researchers have repeatedly found the women's sport received little media coverage and what existed was replete with stereotyping.

Interesting that Knoppers & McDonald¹⁷ state that studies in the last five years: “Confirm that sport governance and ideologies continue to construct sport as a masculine domain” (p. 314). We, involved in the study of women and sport, seem to be ever hopeful and still searching for the turning of the tide towards real transformative change in women's sport.

References

- 1 Lopez de D'Amico R, Benn T, Pfister, G. Women and sport in Latin America. London and New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group; 2016.
- 2 Gill DL. Women's place in the history of sport psychology, *The Sport Psychologist*. 1995, 9, 418-433.
- 3 Oglesby C, Shelton C. Exercise and sport studies: toward a fit, informed and joyful embodiment of feminism. In: Kramarae C., Spender D. (Eds). *The knowledge explosion : generations of feminist scholarship*. Athene Series Teachers College Press Columbia University: New York; 1995.
- 4 Eagly AH, Rose SM, Riger, S, McHugh, M. Feminism and psychology: Analysis of a half century of research on women and gender, *American Psychologist* 2012, 67(3), 211-230.
- 5 Friedan, B. *The feminine mystique*. New York: WWNorton; 1963.
- 6 Chrisler, J. In honor of Sex Roles: Reflections on the history and development of the journal. *Sex Roles* 2010, 63, 299-310
- 7 Morgan W. *Contemporary readings in sport psychology*. Springfield Ma: Charles C. Thomas; 1970.
- 8 Harris D. *Women and sport: a national research conference*. Penn State HPER Series 2: University Park: Penn State Press; 1972.
- 9 Neal P. *Sport and identity*, Pittsburg, Pa: Dorrance Publishing; 1972.
- 10 Gerber E, Felshin J, Berlin P, Wyrick W. *The American Women in Sport*. Boston: Addison-Wesley; 1978.
- 11 Oglesby C. *Women in sport: From myth to reality*. Philadelphia: Lea & Febiger; 1978.
- 12 Rohrbaugh J. Femininity on the line. *Psychology Today* 1979, 13, 3, 30-42.
- 13 Oglesby C. “Changed times or different times: what's happening with ‘women's way’ of sport”. *JOPERD* 1993, 64, 3, 60-63
- 14 Sherif C. “Girls compete?” In: Harris, D. (ed.) *DGWS Research Reports*. Wash. DC: AAHPERD; 1971
- 15 Rubio K, Altmann H, Mourao L, Goeller S. Women and sport in Brazil. In: Lopez de D'Amico R, Benn T, Pfister G. (Eds). *Women and sport in Latin America*. London and New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group; 2016.
- 16 Birrell S, McDonald M. *Reading sport: essays on power and representation*. Boston Northeastern; 2000.
- 17 Knoppers A, McDonald M. Scholarship on gender and sport in *Sex Roles: Journal of Research*. *Sex Roles* 2010, 63, 5(6), 311-323.