

# INTRODUCTION



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*Athletic Intruders: Ethnographic Research on Women, Culture, and Exercise* is an anthology edited by Anne Bolin, Professor of Anthropology at Elon University, and Jane Granskog, Professor of Anthropology at California State University at Bakersfield. The book investigates women's place in sport and exercise from a socio-cultural vantage provided by the fields of the anthropology of sport, the sociology of sport, and feminism. We offer this collection as a contribution to the emerging field of sports ethnography and the study of women and gender relations in the interdisciplinary field of sport/exercise/physical activity and the body—hence the title *Athletic Intruders: Ethnographic Research on Women, Culture, and Exercise*. The title suggests that women's participation in sports and exercise has not come without struggle into the sports arenas marked by male hegemony.

This book evolved from the intersection of our lives as anthropologists, feminists, and athletes. As baby boomers growing up before Title IX, we reaped the benefits of the social revolution of the 1960s, which opened new vistas for women. We pursued our respective careers as anthropologists and feminists. Anne pursued her research on gender by studying the lives of transgendered people while Jane's interest in gender progressed by investigating the adaptive strategies of peasant women in Mexico. It was not until our research shifted into sports and exercise that our lives intersected. Anne began ethnographic research among women bodybuilders while Jane worked with women triathletes. A critical component for instigating such research for each of us lay in the fact that we both first became participants in the sports we

chose to investigate. It was, in fact, the impact that such participation has had on our lives overall that led us to explore the impact of such activities, and the embodiment of self that emerged as a result, upon women in general. Through the grapevine of our discipline, which includes numerous mechanisms for like-minded people to find one another, we established our friendship (a process actually aided by the fact that very few anthropologists were doing the kind of research we were engaged in at the time). We remember back to 1988 when the American Anthropological Association meetings were in Phoenix, Arizona. Independently of one another and before we met, we both noted that we were the only two papers during the conference devoted to issues of women and sport. We wanted to meet each other to talk about our research but kept missing each other. As scholars and athletes with training agendas, our schedules didn't seem to mesh. However, after becoming friends, we solved that dilemma by training together whenever the opportunity arose—often at the various conferences that we scheduled to attend together. Finding each other wasn't the only catalyst for our research.

Another very important person intersected our lives and brought us together to meet other scholars working in the area of gender and sport. Alan Klein, whom we later came to regard as the parent of contemporary sport ethnography, brought us into the North American Society for the Study of Sport Sociology (NASSS). It was through the presentation of papers at the annual meetings of NASSS in the early 1990s that the impetus for putting together a book that simultaneously addressed issues of sport ethnography and the participation of women in athletic activities emerged. It was also at these meetings that we first encountered the significant research that was being carried out by other feminist scholars in sport sociology, notably the seminal work of Susan Birrell, Nancy Theberge, Sharon Guthrie, Shirley Castelnovo, CL Cole, and others. The critical analysis of the role of gender in sport that these scholars provided set the tone for our subsequent work.

We have entitled our book *Athletic Intruders: Ethnographic Research on Women, Culture and Exercise* because, as Susan Birrell (1988:459–502) and Ann Hall (1993:48–68; 1996) so clearly argue in their respective reviews of the literature on women's history in sports and research about women and gender relations in sport/exercise, the view often is one in which women have been invisible, excluded, and marginalized. The following quote vividly illustrates the situation of women/sports relations in societies in which power, prestige, and access to resources is a privilege of men. The following account is offered as a poignant example of this exclusion and taken from the writings of the Greek Pausanias in ca. A.D. 170:

As one goes from Skillos down the road to Olympia, but before one crosses the Alpheios River, there is a mountain high and very steep cliffs. The name of the mountain is Tupaion. The Eleans have a law to throw off these cliffs any women who are discovered at the Olympic festival, or even on the Olympia side of the Alpheios on the days which are forbidden to women. They say that no woman has ever been caught except Kallipateira. (Some say that the name of the woman was Pherenike, not Kallipateira.) She had been widowed and, disguised like a male trainer, she took her son to Olympia to compete. When her son Peisirodos won, Kallipateira jumped over the fence with which the trainers were restrained, and exposed herself. She was thus discovered to be a woman, but they released her unpunished out of respect for her father (Diagoras of Rhodes), her brothers and her son all of whom had been victors at Olympia. They passed a law, however, that in the future trainers would have to attend the competition in the nude (Miller 1979:35).

Women's participation in sport/exercise began to grow dramatically by the 1970s as a result of a convergence of factors. This included the impact of feminism in the 1960s, which continued the mid- to late-nineteenth-century trajectories of early feminists involved with health and dress reform (Bolin 1992:84–85). A new feminist agenda also contributed to relaxing the boundaries circumscribing femininity and bodily expression as well as challenging patriarchy on all fronts. These antecedents, along with the passage of Title IX in 1972, collectively enhanced women's place in athletics. Paralleling women's increasing athletic participation was a growing research interest in women and sports. The latter is the intellectual lineage that has inspired and fired *Athletic Intruders*.

Ann Hall states: "Epistemologically, we must accept that there are women's ways of knowing. Therefore, it follows that feminist research practices reflect this plurality and there can be no one feminist method" (1996:74). Relying on Hall's (1996) review of research trends in the study of women and sport/exercise, we have identified three prominent "ways of knowing" or themes embossed in the works of the contributors to this book. Hall has discussed the value of 1) interpretive research with a non-positivist thrust, and 2) situated analysis with regard to the "importance of history." As cultural anthropologists and feminists, we offer a third theme that is emerging in sport studies, born of anthropology but adopted by other disciplines: interpretive analysis based on the qualitative methodology of ethnography, specifically postmodern/reflexive ethnography. Women's physical activity and somatic culture are focused upon with a broad lens that accents the theoretical with an emphasis on the social construction of femininity/masculinity and gender relations through nine ethnographic case studies. The case studies

we offer illustrate the critical importance of situating feminist research within the context of women's bodily experiences as manifested in personal, social, and cultural discourses. Herein also lies one of the strengths of this text to feminist research. Following the tradition of reflexive and experiential ethnographic research, each of the ethnographic contributions addresses women's somatic experiences and their consequences for the transformation of women's lives as well as the cultural context within which they are located.

In the first chapter, "Reflexive Ethnography, Women, and Sporting Activities," we present an in-depth examination of reflexive ethnography as well as a discussion of the theoretical continuities among the ethnographic case studies. This chapter is followed by nine ethnographic case studies that exemplify current approaches in reflexive and experiential participant-observation. The ethnographies represent recent reflexive and postmodern trends focusing on issues of identity, embodiment, and meaning as expressed in various sports and exercises including triathlons, aerobics, basketball, bodybuilding, weightlifting, motorcycle riding, softball, casual exercise, and rugby. Multicultural and international issues are specifically attended to in three of the ethnographic studies—Terese Stratta's study of African American women in intercollegiate sports at a predominantly white institution, Dona Davis's research in Newfoundland, and P. David Howe's study of women rugby players in England. *Athletic Intruders* concludes with an Afterword that discusses the theoretical intersections of research on sport, exercise, and the body with feminist studies and linkages with the anthropology and sociology of sport. The examination of these diverse ethnographic accounts within such a theoretical framework allows us to better grasp the significance that the gendering of sport, play, and physicality in its myriad forms has upon our lives as a whole. In a very real sense it is the embodiment of gender that informs our lives and sets the parameters for constructing the reality we currently experience. Only by becoming aware of the constraints that circumscribe our expression of ourselves within the world we have defined will we be able to transcend such perceptions to create a different reality that honors the contributions and role of all members. It is with this objective in mind that we offer the following readings.

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