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The female tradition in physical education: *Women First* reconsidered, edited by David Kirk and Patricia Vertinsky, Abingdon, Routledge, 2016, v + 226 pp., £36.99 (paperback), ISBN 978-1-13-855869-4

There has been a considerable level of global research into the history of physical education since the original publication of Sheila Fletcher's *Women First* (London, 1984), which investigated the history of female physical educators in Britain from 1880-1980. In this edited collection Patricia Vertinsky and David Kirk collate a series of chapters from a wide range of international researchers to revisit the questions originally explored through Fletcher's 1980s research. This book covers the same time period as Fletcher but with some additional discussions that lead us up to the present day. Collectively the contributing researchers have re-examined Fletcher's conclusions, as well as her data analysis (by revisiting her primary sources), whilst adding new global perspectives with chapters on Sweden, the USA, and beyond.

An interesting feature of the book is the 'insider' and 'outsider' structure which is followed throughout – I found this particularly intriguing as an oral historian as some of the chapters read like personal reflections or narratives. For the editors, this was a way to present different forms of representation and analysis of the past, with book chapters being written by 'insiders' (female physical education teachers) or 'outsiders' (researchers without experience of physical education teaching). Within the 'insider' chapters we see personal narratives and experiences intertwined with historical arguments and discussions, as is the case within the sections by Margaret Whitehead (chapter 4) and Catriona Parratt (chapter 9). Indeed, both of these are unusual but refreshing contributions to the field when contextualised within the other chapters of the book. Collectively the approach provides as close to a comprehensive picture of this subject as could be hoped for within one book.

The overarching theme of the book is to re-examine the themes of *Women First*. This re-examining is something approached in terms of the present-day context of a physical education teaching culture which is suggested (in some chapters) to be less mindful of 'movement' studies, rehabilitation and physical/physiotherapy than some of the original versions of physical education which developed as part of the 'female tradition' of the early 20th century. The re-examining also tries to redress the balance and some of the absences from Fletcher's original work. For example, in the introduction, Vertinsky notes that the 'passage of time' (p.2) has meant that certain themes that were deemed taboo in Fletcher's research, now appear as telling silences that are worthy of fuller exploration and analysis in the context of more fully developed historiography. Vertinsky observes that feminism, sexuality, and issues of social class were not covered in Fletcher's research, but have been addressed in the various chapters here. There is also a revisiting of Fletcher's original primary sources by Stephanie Daniels and Anita Tedder (chapter 5). Through their research Daniels and Tedder return to Fletcher's oral history transcripts, as well as the Bedford College archives, to explore 'hidden histories and silences in the female tradition' (p.75). They also explore the issue of subjectivities within the oral history interview, something which is crucial to keep in mind as we attempt to process and reflect on the data Fletcher collected.

The book presents a more complex picture of the 'female tradition' of physical education teaching than that which was presented in Fletcher's book. The original narrative is that though the female physical educators had built up a 'female tradition' where their techniques and focus had dominance in this field, after World War Two male physical educators focused more on the science of sport, which was slightly at odds with the female tradition (according to Fletcher). The international field of physical education also moved in this 'scientific' direction in the latter half of the twentieth century, leaving the women to

adapt or exit the profession. What *The Female Tradition* shows is that the picture is much more nuanced. Indeed, for her own chapter (12) on physical education programmes in the United States of America, Martha Verbrugge shows that ‘customary generalisations about women physical educators in the US have been mistaken’, (p.192), and that ‘there was no single “female tradition” in American physical education during the first half of the twentieth century’ (p.198). In chapter 11 Wrynn suggests that in the USA there is a new tradition of kinesiology/physical education teaching where the connections are now much more closely aligned with physical/physiotherapy, and this has its roots in the original female tradition and its ‘hygienic roots’ (p.181) of the late 19th century and Swedish gymnastics. Anne Flintoff’s chapter 8 explores the transition to co-educational physical education training in the 1970s, looking at the increasingly gendered notions of what one deemed ‘important’ issues and subjects when teaching and studying physical education. Flintoff also stresses the complexities in shifting gender dynamics during this time, as well as real practical issues (such as a lack of female toilets in originally male colleges) that took time to be fully addressed. Kirk’s focus on Carnegie College in Leeds (chapter 7) notes that the timing of this opening meant that most male physical education teachers had experienced active military service so this contributed to a hyper-masculinised culture. An interesting theme covered in a number of chapters in the collection is the history of dance and dance education, including the development of dance as a credible profession with women at its centre, as Maggie Killingbeck notes in chapter 6: ‘in dance education, while Laban was the pioneer, women were and still seem to be at the helm’ (p.104).

Though all chapters align with the theme and aim, there is real variety in the content. This is a welcome contribution to the field and does well to complement Fletcher’s original work, whilst also showing how the development of theoretical frameworks and standardised approaches (for example in oral history) have helped to improve our production and analysis of source materials to refine our understanding of the past.

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