

# Patricia Vertinsky on Becoming and Being a Feminist Sport Historian: A Dialogue with Beccy Watson

Beccy Watson and Patricia Vertinsky

## By Way of an Introduction

This dialogue was recorded in the autumn of 2016 and followed an earlier informal meeting in 2015 and some exchange of ideas over email. I am very grateful to Patricia for sharing her opinions and for her generosity and openness in outlining her own career development as well as highlighting various pertinent and persistent issues for feminist scholarship across physical education and sport, and significantly how history informs our feminist analysis of these areas. It is a real privilege to have had the opportunity to chat about and discuss Patricia's academic career, which spans more than 40 years (for selected relevant material please see publications by Patricia Vertinsky listed in references from 1990 through to 2017). Of course, I have used my prerogative as "editor", and what is selected from an audio recording does not capture *all* the nuances that a conversational interview brings (there are also some things that are best, by mutual agreement, left out of the transcript). I knew I wanted to talk to Patricia about ideas and issues relevant to this first theme of the handbook and I was keen for her to detail the development of her research interests and how she regards herself as being a feminist sport historian. Much of the dialogue alludes to the fact that there is no simple description of feminist sport history or feminist sport

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historians. I found the discussion facilitated and published by Thorpe and Olive (2012) on feminist sport history useful in framing my questions, in addition to a number of Patricia's publications. A selected bibliography is presented at the end of the chapter, including any texts mentioned in the dialogue.

PV: ...well I've never liked to call myself specifically a sport historian because I've always thought that was such a narrow concept and I'm trained more broadly ... I was trained as a revisionist historian and my dissertation, way back, was about the late nineteenth-century Social Purity movement, which was all about health and physicality but wasn't focused upon the profession of physical education or the development of sport and exercise studies or kinesiology.

BW: How did you come to it then? Because talking about "on being a feminist historian", I thought it would be quite nice actually to capture a little bit for the readership on "becoming". So for you, what's a revisionist historian?

PV: Well a revisionist historian was that moment in the mid-to-late '70s when formal history was being turned on its head and I was trained by a group (of North American male historians) who were thinking about history in a completely different way, so I was trained to think outside the box and to think differently. However, following that I was hired into a Faculty of Education where I was very much needed for being a physical educator.

BW: Right, so did you have a related interest or involvement with physical education?

PV: I was one of the early students at Birmingham University (UK), the Physical Education Department which was the only place you could take a physical education degree at that time. It was a really important moment and I knew they were desperately struggling to make sure that this was seen as an academic degree in physical education—so physical activity and sports had very little to do with our studies. It was science, physics and a year in the medical school. So I received a combined degree in history and physical education with a compulsory language component. And then I completed a Diploma of Education to become a teacher and became a teacher in a grammar school for a couple of years.

BW: And were you teaching PE or PE and history?

PV: Well I was teaching history and physical education. I was the Head of Department in Physical Education because I came from a university. It was actually quite embarrassing to the team; there were three other male and female physical educators who were all from training colleges, but I had a degree so I was automatically launched, you know, "above" far more

accomplished teachers than I was. It was fun, however, working at a North of England grammar school. I enjoyed it, but left when I received a scholarship to go to UCLA in California to do a Master's degree. It was an MSc, though again largely focused on history and physical education with a speciality in sociology. From there, I visited South America where almost by accident I was offered a job at the Universidad del Valle in Cali, Colombia. So my first academic job was in South America and what they wanted me to do was to go into the countryside and develop health and physical education programmes for rural populations, which was where I became particularly interested in the politics of health.

BW: So that's a far cry from being a teacher in a grammar school, so falling into a job like that...

PV: It was really interesting, but I can remember also that it was like a light switch in terms of finding myself in a situation where I began to develop a whole new set of political understandings and promoting health and physical activity to underserved populations.

BW: Did you see yourself as an activist?

PV: Well I think I learned the importance of being an activist even though I probably wasn't at the time ... though I remember that I did quarrel with the Peace Corps and their standardized approaches to fitness, which seemed quite inappropriate for these populations ... I was involved in one or two radical health promotion projects which were then closed down by the local government because any kind of successful health venture tended to raise expectations among the population which were often not met...

BW: Okay. And was there a feminist sense to that do you think? Was it about the women's health or...

PV: Only in as much as the fact that Columbia was a strictly Catholic country ruled by the Pope, with a very poor rural population, such that women were demonstrably disadvantaged in a number of ways and strongly affected by fatalist views.

BW: And so from there...

PV: From there ... well I came to understand during that time that there were considerable shifts in thinking about research around poverty issues and research in health education. I saw how visiting US researchers had been conducting experiments in nutrition, for example, where food could be withheld from control groups. This was a moment when many of these kinds of studies were being rethought from an ethical perspective, just as historians were revisioning their approaches to their own work. Second-wave feminism was burgeoning as well. It was all very exciting ... from having being schooled in the North of England

during the conservative post-war years to the radical political changes occurring in the late 1960s and 1970s.

BW: So to see all these questions and changes ...

PV: It was enormous. I met and moved with my husband to Chicago and then to British Columbia (Canada) in the early 1970s and that's where I did my doctoral work.

BW: Right. And your thesis?

PV: Yes, as I mentioned I studied the Social Purity movement in the late nineteenth century—a movement that sought to abolish prostitution and other sexual activities that were considered immoral and inappropriate.

BW: Including morality?

PV: Yes. I think my first published article was on sexual morality and physical education and that led me to an interest in the work of Catharine Beecher, an early physical educator of women. In fact in trying to reflect back on my work over time, I notice that I keep finding really interesting women to study, particularly women more broadly involved in physical culture and dance, and trying to understand what it was that impelled them into their interest or curiosity or drive about physical activity. This led me to write my first book on *The Eternally Wounded Woman* (Vertinsky, 1994) related to women and exercise in the late nineteenth century which seems to have stood the test of time and is still quite useful.

BW: Maybe this is a good point to, when you say “referring back to something”, I was thinking we tend to teach in a particular way about second-wave, third-wave (feminism) and I guess in your area, and we'll get onto her later, but like Joan W. Scott as a feminist historian, people become the “canon” and that becomes the thing that takes it forward. Yet surely from a feminist position, and I guess I'm thinking there of my own interest about everything being intersectional we tend to theoretically and conceptually “move on” because we're all trying to prove that there's something new and better but there's really fundamental arguments in the things that are embedded.

PV: I think that we use what you might call the “waves” notion as an organizing device when we are teaching. I'm sometimes astonished when teaching third and fourth year students at their limited historical and geographical background. Any conception of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as a wave of wars and gender shifts, for example, is often missing. Maybe now with Brexit and Donald Trump, and this wave of dissatisfied white men who feel like they've been left behind, students will come to view these events more broadly from a historical perspective.

BW: I think that's intriguing to know whether this will be a distinct phase currently and what comes out of it.

- PV: And I think we feminists have got to start and better understand this anger as not just economic...
- BW: Or a passing backlash.
- PV: It's very much about social positioning and having a lot to do with the power of women who are doing so much better, in a number of ways; in graduate school for example our students comprise 70% women. It's women who are getting the doctorates, it's the women who are getting scholarships, it's the women who are getting into medicine which is now of course seen as less important because it's becoming female dominated. We can see how every time a profession or an arena becomes female dominated it somehow loses its status.
- BW: Just going back to *Eternally Wounded Women*, what are some of its legacies?
- PV: Well when I wrote that book, I was a young theorist and I used Foucault's work substantially when not many people were interested in his theories. It seemed new and a bit daring at the time because many of my colleagues thought this kind of theorizing was a waste of time. And I remember there were critiques about the book as being polemical and certainly over-theorized. And then, in comes the '90s and all of a sudden Foucault was everywhere. Everybody was using Foucault and the call began to go out to 'forget Foucault, we've had enough of it and we're sick of it'. And then his theories rolled back in again and young sociologists, are using his work in a wide variety of arenas.
- BW: That's back to I guess that point of who does become canonized in terms of theory?
- PV: So I learned that fashions go around, that sometimes you're praised for being a theorist and other times criticized when the theory goes out of fashion. I learnt to be more adaptable I think.
- BW: So when you were involved in writing *The Eternally Wounded Woman*, had you been influenced by Joan W. Scott (see Scott, 1986) by then or was that slightly later?
- PV: That was later; at the time I didn't think about categorizing my dissertation as a feminist document. It was just a solid revisionist, historical narrative that would have been done from a feminist perspective.
- BW: And then what happened about the thesis, where did that lead you?
- PV: Well this again led to my having to adapt to the shifting waves or the shifting traditions in academia because when I was first hired I was required to do a lot of teaching and had little time for research.
- BW: And what would you have been teaching mostly?
- PV: I was teaching physical education really and health promotion.

BW: And so teaching teachers?

PV: Yeah, and graduate students. I was hired into a physical education, teacher education department that was filled with a number of people who'd been trained in England as physical educators.

BW: And did you enjoy it? Did you like teaching?

PV: Yes, I did like teaching potential teachers and working with schools.

BW: And do you like teaching physical education?

PV: I quite liked teaching physical education, although I've never been particularly passionate about studying organized sport. I rode ponies when I was a kid and swam and I was always an individualist more than a team player, but no, I enjoyed it. But I also loved research work and of course I was one of the few at the time who had a doctorate and the possibility of a research career. Many of my colleagues were physical education instructors who were on lower-track levels and did no research, and yet it was becoming clear in those transition years that if I was going to get tenure one had to do research. So I remember having to struggle to do research almost "secretly" because my female head thought it was just a waste of time, that I should, you know, spend more time with my students.

BW: Is that one of the tensions you think that, again, that we need, that we can see it in the bigger picture of feminism?

PV: Absolutely, and it was a really gendered issue. Here I was writing articles extolling co-education and equal female sporting opportunities yet when you went into the high schools you could see that the men had all the best facilities and equipment—all the advantages—I "itched" against that.

BW: What was going on in your research?

PV: My earliest research was focused upon what I understood was needed to develop my academic career and it wasn't historical research that was going to gain me tenure. Empirical research in *Research Quarterly* was expected with statistical analysis along with observational studies in schools and colleges. I always tried to focus on gender where possible but...

BW: Did you feel that the history wasn't central to that?

PV: No it wasn't in that world. I'll give you a useful example. Let me back up a little bit. I was in the Faculty of Education for only a few years while the School of Physical Education and Recreation led by Bob Morford who had been trained by Franklin Henry in Berkeley was caught up in the transformation of the '80s from being a profession into being a discipline. This was the moment when the coaches were

losing their jobs, and scientists were being hired. Bob came to me and said 'We want you with us', so I joined the School. ... I was young, married with two young kids trying to find a work/life balance and develop a research focus, but there were few support facilities. So I became involved with a group of feminist academics who pushed to build day-care facilities, staff them and clean them. There was no maternity leave at the time, there were none of today's benefits whatsoever. So I was in this vanguard in the late '70s and '80s pushing for these privileges for women academics at the same time that I was trying to show that I could be a serious researcher...

BW: To be taken seriously, yeah, yeah.

PV: It was an interesting time, for I've always been interested in the relationship and struggles between the profession of physical education and the discipline/s of sport and exercise science, and indeed as time went on I found a wonderful mentor in Roberta Park who herself had navigated that role very successfully as a Head of Department in University of California, Berkeley.

BW: So was she involved at the time you entered the School of Physical Education and Recreation?

PV: No, that came later. I didn't have a mentor in my early faculty years, there had been no mentors for me until then.

BW: I think I knew the answer to that question. So on the one hand you're having to create the places in which you can continue to do your own work and to establish an academic career as well as fulfil the traditional gendered role of being the person who's responsible for the children and everything else. Was there any awareness of that or were you just being "allowed" to do that? So you could put in all that extra effort and build a nursery and run it, well fine, if you can still come to work. As PE developed as a discipline was there any support or recognition?

PV: Not really in those early days. In fact, when I was in the Faculty of Education some of the female faculty were quite cruel and quite open about the fact that they thought a woman who had children should be at home.

BW: And in terms of the men?

PV: They were paid more and got more choices in selecting their teaching and research activities. When one looks back now, I find it quite astonishing how things have changed, because now when we hire bright young men who are parents they quite expect to have flexibility of time, parental support and reduced workloads.

BW: Women have never been able to take that privilege and that goes on, I think that's still a massive, recurring issue.

PV: We did hide these problems and were apologetic about having to make time for late afternoon meetings, which could be desperately problematic. I remember this clearly and I'm so pleased that there's a change and that women can demand the kinds of support we didn't have.

BW: Yes.

PV: So to move back to my research, when I moved to the School where we had less teaching and more research requirements, our research was annually "valued" on a points system. The scoring provided eight points for a refereed article and six points for a book ... so certain kinds of articles or a book that could have taken five years to write would get less points in this system. It was clear that one had to work in the scientific paradigm to get on, and I did for some time in my early career. It was only when I was tenured that I was really able to turn back to do the kind of historical work that I really wanted to do—it was then that I think really I began to do serious sport history work in...

BW: When you wrote *Eternally Wounded Woman*?

PV: Right, right.

BW: And you took a risk because that wasn't really science based?

PV: I did take a risk but that of course allowed me to do more history ... but it also focused me towards the need to generate research funds, to write successful research grants, work with graduate students and to also get involved very specifically in organizations and networking which supported sport historians.

BW: Would you say that funding is, not to over simplify it, harder to come by so if you say 'Oh this is a feminist sport history piece of research' or do you have to construct it quite differently in order to get it?

PV: Well there are now many different forms of funding but in the '80s mostly you went to the main national research councils, for you it's Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) is it?

BW: Well, Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) more usually (as an ideal).

PV: For us it's the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and that's where I have been fortunate to be continuously funded in my research.

BW: So they were supportive in funding the kind of research that you wanted to do?

PV: I've always had to learn to use my professional background in the best way in disciplinary research.

BW: So what did *Eternally Wounded Woman* establish for you?



- PV: I think that once I got involved in the North American Sport History organization and the British Sport History organization and other arenas, I began to meet people who were doing the same things as me and I think it was my early days in these sport history organizations that provided such good support for my own research activities.
- BW: Do you think you've got a sense of when you were recognized or embodied this idea of a feminist historian as opposed to a sport historian or...?
- PV: Yes, absolutely, I mean it was clear that my work was increasingly feminist orientated and it was clear that I was part of the group of feminists in these organizations—who some of the men often complained about.
- BW: I can remember you talking about that when we had the celebratory event for Jenny Hargreaves held at Leeds Beckett University September 2014, to mark 20 years since *Sporting Females* first published (see Hargreaves, 1994). In terms of you saying that male historians sometimes just didn't get it—and I mean in a sense we know that, so I wasn't going to prolong any particular questions about that but there you are, then, back in your earlier research having to, you know, probably everywhere you go in sport history remind people: 'Hang on a minute, it's got another dimension'.
- PV: Many times it just seemed to be fashionable to put down feminist history.
- BW: I find it fascinating because I don't know what the figures in terms of human resourcing in Canada are like but in the UK the female professoriate is (still) not representative at all in terms of gender balance, the senior positions that women hold in universities are still management orientated and people-management orientated.
- PV: Our professoriate at the moment in kinesiology is still mostly male, our tenure hires are a little bit of a different story. This is tempered by the shifts in the world of sport and exercise science or what we call kinesiology because essentially the whole "exercise is medicine" paradigm has taken over in North America. So my School, for example, is now chaired by a physiologist and all of our Research Chairs are science oriented and do little teaching. They have little interest or knowledge in physical education ... So I actually like to bring up issues around pedagogy when possible because I think we have to remember that our eleven hundred kinesiology students are not all going to be physiotherapists or sport med doctors, and that many of them may find it very useful to learn some pedagogical skills, whether they become physical educators or not.
- BW: Yeah, my mind was flitting all over the place there because the parallels are just the same, I mean in the UK, although there's an embracing of

supposedly wider notions of physical activity, wellbeing, it's through a public health lens and that public health lens has not really embraced a critical social science perspective, it's a medicalized programme evaluation, it's 'get me an evidence base that proves...'

PV: Yeah, I'm very concerned about it and actually have been writing about it because our scientists completely accept the "exercise is medicine" model and promote it, partly because that's where the research money is. I read an article recently from someone who just won a million dollar grant to look at why doctors don't promote exercise and I thought that's really interesting, here's an article I wrote about this in 1972 that examined the same phenomenon with the same results. Students and young scientists don't always look back at similar work that has been done years before.

BW: And how was that received?

PV: Well I think that in many respects it is our responsibility to speak back to our young scientists and provide historical and sociological insight into a number of myths around race and gender; about Kenyan runners, for example, or the female triad, or the instruments they use in comparing bone density by race or gender.

BW: So you are encouraging them to bust those myths.

PV: I regard it as an education; surely their studies would be so much more valid if they didn't try to demonstrate that females breathe differently than males (see Braun, 2014) or that Chinese children have lighter bones.

BW: It throws up so many things.

PV: Yes and that's why feminist sport history can be quite helpful.

BW: So are women being represented on these research boards now where medical discourse is dominating; are there female medics within that and are they just reproducing the dominant discourse of that medical science?

PV: Yes I think so in some respects. National Institutes of Health (NIH) likes to have an interdisciplinary perspective on their peer reviews. Of course we're dangerously now talking about men and women as if they were two different species and of course we've got thoughtful male scientists at the same time as young female scientists who think exactly the same as the men, and are not using a feminist lens.

BW: That's a question I was coming to, has feminism made any sort of dent on that?

PV: Not as much as we would wish perhaps. Our young female faculty do tend sometimes to follow the male lead and expect support to be in place for them ... And they don't seem to mind that often it's the older feminists who carry the loads and sit on the committees, because the

system doesn't find (and pay for) replacements when they take maternity leaves and so on.

BW: So whether we like it or not, it's about being accommodated into the 'system' as it exists already? I don't know how much things have changed. It's given lots of women many opportunities but I don't know if that's feminist. And the basis of your work? Is that a legacy then of some of your revisionist history? The detail, the questions you ask, how you would go about asking those questions? And what do you think that kind of relationship has with say a feminist standpoint? Is there a feminist canon that you're a part of?

PV: It's a driving force. I think that's just the way I've been trained and the way my career has worked out and I've been so fortunate, you know, in making my voice heard—I find that I often get a healthy respect from our scientists when discussing a feminist standpoint ... 'we'll listen to her ideas but she's not much help in the lab!'

BW: In terms of what history contributes, isn't it fascinating the way in which the body is central to your work though some suggest a focus on the body is "new". Surely there's a sense in which people could get even "better" history now because we've got so much access to information, because we've got so much access to archives so is that being taken on or is it still a niche?

PV: You/we mentioned Jenny Hargreaves and, she and I have focused on the body for decades and have continued to ask critical questions. I have actually been very pleased that there seems to be an effervescence and emergence of calls for sport historians and a variety of new jobs opening in the US, the UK and especially in Europe. It's true I think that a lot of the current focus is on competitive sport because it's so important financially and otherwise, but it is also history departments now that are hiring sport historians as well as in political science and anthropology, law and even medical schools who see the history of health and medicine and physical activity as important to their training of interns.

BW: I think there are links with how sport has been seen, it's like when there's work in cultural studies or women's studies where they go 'Oh wouldn't it be interesting to look at sport' and you're thinking 'We've been trying to tell you that, that this is an important...'

PV: Well when David Andrews "invented" physical cultural studies and invited me in to talk about it, I said 'You know, I've been doing this all my life' ... along with many of my colleagues focused on the female body. I didn't know it was invented in 2008! (see Andrews, 2008). I mean anthropologists have been writing about physical culture for as long as we remember, so maybe some sociologists are a bit late to that table.

- BW: I did history before going to university and now we do have access to more information and more accessible and archived information. I mean in terms of what you can actually tap into.
- PV: Yeah, it's amazing what is now available in the archives.
- BW: One of the things I'd noted down is to ask what happened to the idea of male sports sociologists being pro-feminist.
- PV: Well there are some well-known male sociologists who have done a wonderful job on behalf of feminism, but it's also partly the compartmentalization of issues, like race. Some people, you know, feel they dare not write about race unless they're the "right" colour.
- BW: But that's not what feminism ever wanted to achieve.
- PV: I know, but it has happened, further compartmentalization.
- BW: Yeah, but the same could be said about sexuality, in some ways, I mean I've spent some time in the work that I've been doing around boys and girls, looking at masculinity and dance and it's no wonder that looking at masculinity entails looking at gender because it's the main lens to go to. But then the debates so quickly become about sexuality and gender and masculinity but they're not always intersectional, they don't capture all the other factors.
- PV: That's quite true.
- BW: So back to Joan W. Scott, for you, what's her legacy?
- PV: Well she was an important turning point when in the late '70s and early '80s feminist historians were beginning to get an occasional open door. Bonnie Smith has a wonderful book on gender and history (Smith, 1998), which reflects the Joan Scott premise. She said the profession's unacknowledged libidinal work—the social ideology that draws us to value male plenitude, power and self—is but rarely glimpsed in the mirror of history. Male historians had tended to simply ignore feminist histories—as if they weren't doing "real history". Scott was prepared to speak up and underscore how gender offered a good way to think about history and she was eloquent enough to push open doors for those of us who were working on gender issues. In sociology of sport it was a bit different, they were mostly Marxists who didn't want to pay much attention to gender, and lots of our male sociologists are still Marxists.
- BW: I came to critical history through Marxism, it was just that I was lucky enough not to have to stop there and get to feminism as well so in a sense politically it was very useful.
- PV: Well that's in the Jenny Hargreaves mode, right?
- BW: Um, yeah, yeah I guess so. And I was lucky (and privileged) to be taught by Sheila Scraton and she was my key PhD supervisor (along

with Margaret Talbot and Sue Clegg). I can remember Scott (Scott, 1986) being influential when I was doing my dissertation for my PhD, that was the end of the '90s, the early 2000s.

PV: What did you do your PhD on?

BW: Young mothers' leisure lifestyles. I had had my first child before going to college at the end of the 1980s. And then my thesis was about difference (in the mid-1990s), theorizing difference. It was an interesting time and I lived in a big, fairly multicultural city and half of my research participants identified with a South Asian diaspora in the UK and the leisure and sport PE literature was still very much 'South Asian girls can't do PE and South Asian women don't do sport because of "tradition" and "culture"' and blah, blah, the same generalizations...

PV: That's really interesting. But of course you still get that view.

BW: In some ways, for me it links to your stuff about challenging the kinesiologists, by taking something and showing them they can't ignore these things.

PV: But they still ignore it far too often I think.

BW: Well I know but I like to think it does at least make something of a difference, to challenge and disrupt. I was interviewing second-generation women who saw themselves between what they perceived as being their cultural heritage, if and where they perceived that as significant, and how they viewed e.g. bringing up their children, what they wanted for them, what they wanted for themselves (across "work" and leisure and in some cases, education).

PV: It's interesting because we've got now this sizeable Chinese population in British Columbia and Vancouver, in some areas up to 70% Chinese and I've written quite a bit now about different health paradigms and their relation to cultural practices. Meanwhile we have scientists making claims about the lightness of Chinese children's bones and their need for special physical activities. And I want to ask, what does this kind of crude racial classification mean for policy and practical physical education? Do we not have to be far more careful about the implications of these kinds of studies?

BW: It is difficult not to be quite depressed about it because feminists were pointing these things out. Challenging homogenization and generalization.

PV: I am depressed about the extent of these kinds of studies in health and medicine and also the ways in which a lot of the knowledge of past female physical educators—who certainly would not necessarily have claimed to be feminists but did wonderful work—has been neglected.

The replacement of so many female college gymnasiums in the last few decades by science labs and buildings is one example of that.

BW: I don't think we fully explore debates about what those women-only spaces represent. Spatiality is key to a lot of my research interests.

PV: Yeah, well space is fascinating and its relation to architecture tells us a lot about the construction of knowledge around physical education. In my book about the War Memorial Gymnasium (Vertinsky & McKay, 2004), which is the home of my Department, I traced the development of the discipline of kinesiology between 1950 and 2010 through its changing spaces. First the bowling alley goes, then the computer labs move in. As more male scientists were hired they took more and more of the space for laboratories. The end result was a completely different spatial world that had little to do with active moving bodies ... the gym is now on deferred maintenance and will probably be soon deemed non-functional for a kinesiology department and closed.

BW: One of the things in my notes is, regarding your contribution, not just the kind of history you do but the questions that emerge for you and the detail of what's going on, it brings to life what the research is.

PV: Well maybe there's a whole gender story in itself. Feminist historians challenge, are challenging, but the scientists don't always like it when women press gender issues upon them. You know there is wonderful work in the history of medicine, for example, by men but when women do it, it sometimes brings with it a different view, you know, maybe I'm wrong but...

BW: Sadly I think you're right...

BW: Let's try and end on a more positive note.

PV: Well there's a whole other world in the academy as well, I mean there are lots of disrupters and we do have some fantastic young female and male faculty who are doing really interesting work around gender and sport and are deserving of a great deal of help and support by older feminist sport historians.

BW: Are they bringing new ways of thinking about history?

PV: Yes they are, and they're bringing new talents, for example, lots of clever new uses of technology. It's exhausting trying to keep up with all the new developments. Some of our young faculty are very technology-savvy and they use those channels to sort of go off in a number of new directions, asking innovative questions and seeking out new solutions. On the other hand, even when the academy is seemingly being transformed, change remains very slow in a number of respects ... I mean right now the government keeps funding new Research Chairs and claiming they should be given to female researchers but then as soon as it gets to the selection committees .... well you know the whole story.

- BW: Yeah, the panels, the selection is still absolutely...
- PV: Gendered.
- BW: Here and now and looking forward, what are you working on right now?
- PV: Too many things as always!
- BW: Yes, it sounds like a lot.
- PV: But it's a lot of fun. I'm just finishing working on what I call Requiem for the female college gymnasium in North America; I am exploring American modern dancer Ted Shawn's development of a famous troupe of men dancers composed of male athletes in the 1930s (Vertinsky, 2017); I've been examining global flows of knowledge around yoga and the role of the YMCA physical educators in colonial India; and completing a review for the National Academy of Kinesiology on the history of kinesiology.
- BW: I had never heard you speak until you came to the event for *Sporting Females* in 2014. It's the way in which you tell a bigger story from the individuals that you're interested in.
- PV: That's so perceptive because that's what I try to do, I become attracted to the lives of particular people at historical moments and then try to understand the personal and institutional and local and national reasons for their fascination and interest in physical culture and how it was related to knowledge and understandings of the active body at the time...
- BW: You're doing that in such an informed and politically infused way. Your level of detail and understanding what, not just that person's experience is about, it's the 'so what?' part. It's a really important contribution to feminism in our area.
- PV: Perhaps I'm just lucky that at this stage of my career I still have the opportunities to do it. I keep thinking I would like to write another monograph related to gender and physical culture and have a number of ideas to explore, but time will tell.
- BW: Well let's hope you do. I'll stop the tape there.
- PV: That was such fun.
- BW: Thank you so much.

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