

# Spreading the Word

## British Sportswomen and the International Diffusion of Sport

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### *Introduction*

Historically, sport has been understood as a masculine domain, statistically and ideologically dominated by men. It has been constructed as the embodiment of fundamentally masculine values such as strength and aggression, physical power and competitiveness: values that cannot easily be mapped onto traditional constructions of femininity.<sup>1</sup> Through its challenge to perceived gender norms, sporting participation by women has been considered both unnatural and a transgression of the natural order relating to women's and men's roles in society, so it has often experienced prejudice and oppression. This is evident in the way in which women's participation has been, and continues to be, portrayed in the sporting press.<sup>2</sup> It can also be seen in the way that male-dominated organizations have resisted or marginalized female participation, especially in aggressively male sports such as boxing and rugby, and in the demarcation of certain sports, like swimming and figure skating, as feminine-appropriate activities.<sup>3</sup>

From its early days as an emerging sub-discipline in the field of historical inquiry, sports history has reflected, and often reinforced, this impression of male dominance, although recent historical analysis has begun to recognize that sport is a gendered arena,<sup>4</sup> and that issues of gender have inevitably influenced the development of sporting cultures at a regional, national and international level. Some scholars, for example, arguing that the concept of 'the sporting body' is full of ambiguous cultural meanings, have utilized biographical studies of female sporting pioneers from around the globe to explore ways in which they used sport to circumscribe and challenge traditional expectations and to stimulate female participation in sport and physical culture. The role of Frenchwoman Madame Alice Milliat, whose efforts in the 1920s and 1930s forced Olympic organizers to recognize that women desired to compete internationally alongside their male counterparts, was an important contribution to this kind

of research.<sup>5</sup> In many respects, however, this initial exploration has not been developed further, although *Sport and the Emancipation of European Women: The Struggle for Self-fulfilment* (2016) presented a pan-European perspective by exploring how European women contributed to the emancipation of women through their struggles within the sporting world.<sup>6</sup>

This kind of analysis has not been fully realised with respect to the experiences of British sportswomen, even though much of the historiography relating to the worldwide diffusion of sporting knowledge highlights the role of British participants in the adoption of their rules, structures and sporting values.<sup>7</sup> Like their male counterparts, British women were influential in this process and this paper uses the example of three female advocates from different sports and time periods to emphasize the impact that they made. They represent only a fraction of the many women involved but they provide informative exemplars of the different ways in which, from the mid-nineteenth to mid-twentieth centuries, British women engaged with sport, as professionals and entrepreneurs, athletes and coaches, administrators and leaders. Their biographies also illustrate the sportswoman's capacity to challenge existing patriarchal structures and to act as a role model for others, whether this be part of a deliberate personal agenda or an unintended consequence of their sporting activities.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, Agnes Beckwith, professional swimmer and aquatic entertainer, travelled extensively to Europe and North America, resulting in several imitators replicating her activities. One consequence was an increase in the global acceptance of swimming as an appropriate female activity. At the start of the twentieth century, oarswoman Lucy Pocock, the first Ladies Champion Sculler of the Thames in 1912, left England for North America where she began coaching the University of Washington's women's rowing team, promoting the women's programme and defending it against male, and female, disapproval. In the post-second world war period, netball administrator and physical education lecturer, Doris Wilkie, was influential in the creation of an international profile for the sport. In her role as chair of the All England Netball Association (AENA) she promoted a visit by an Australian team in 1956 and convened an international rules conference in 1957. When the International Federation of Women's Basketball and Netball was formed in 1960, her contribution was publicly acknowledged. The life courses of these women are considered here, together with reflections on what motivated them to travel abroad or to establish international networks. The paper concludes by drawing together some common themes that might be applied more generally to the engagement of women with the process of the international diffusion of sports and makes some suggestions about future research directions.

#### *Agnes Beckwith (1861 – 1951)*

The development of nineteenth-century English swimming relied heavily on the activities of swimming professors and their families who promoted the sport through chal-

lenges and competitions and established classes for teaching swimming and lifesaving. Like their contemporaries, the leading swimming family of the period, the Beckwiths, included summer seasons at seaside resorts as well as appearances in crystal tanks on the stages of variety theatres and music halls. Female members of the family proved popular and Agnes Beckwith became the most recognized and acclaimed natationist of the period, both at home and abroad. Accompanied by husband William Taylor and brother Willie, Agnes exhibited in America and Canada in 1883 where her aquatic displays were witnessed by thousands of spectators and the family engagements were extended by over a week.<sup>8</sup> Agnes also swam with P.T. Barnum's 'Greatest Show on Earth' at Madison Square Garden in 1887. Describing her act, one reporter recalled the excitement when Agnes stepped out onto the elevated stage and bowed gracefully to 7,000 spectators before diving into a huge water tank. The 'picturesque aquatic expert' dived and waltzed like a swan, turned somersaults, swam under water and climaxed the performance by propelling herself along with undulations of the body while her hands and feet were bound together.<sup>9</sup>

Following Agnes's performances, the Beckwith name appeared in North American newspapers long after her return to England and her second visit stimulated several imitators who then disseminated swimming knowledge across the continent. An Annie 'Beckwith', described as a 'noted English natator', emerged in Boston in 1888. A year later, newspapers were reporting a six-day swimming contest in Boston involving an Alice 'Beckwith', supposedly a cousin of Agnes.<sup>10</sup> In 1888, a Clara 'Beckwith' appeared in a tank scene at the Providence Museum and advertisements began appearing in 1893 for a Cora 'Beckwith', demonstrator of the 'famous Beckwith Backward Sweep' and 'Champion Lady swimmer of the World'. Clara and Cora performed regularly on stage and in travelling fairs in America over the decades following Agnes' visits with both women consistently claiming British roots and connections to the Beckwith dynasty. Cora, born Cora MacFarland in Maine in 1870, asserted that she had swum the English Channel alongside Matthew Webb. Clara, baptised Clara Sabean in Nova Scotia in 1870, stated in her 1893 autobiography that she had been born in Lambeth in 1867, and identified her father as William Manning Beckwith, 'Champion Swimmer of England'. These women not only appropriated the Beckwith name, but they also annexed the Beckwith routines, including endurance floating and ornamental swimming.

Agnes spent her winters in England touring indoor facilities with a troupe of female swimmers and Cora replicated this practice in America for many years. Cora's 'Neptune's Daughters' featured on the bill at the Strand in 1917 in a diving act considered one of the 'best aquatic entertainments in vaudeville'.<sup>11</sup> Just as Agnes spent her summers at English seaside resorts, Cora established her own summer season touring the fairs, carnivals and festivals, although she had to take the paraphernalia of her performances with her. In 1904, she exhibited in a portable tank fifty feet long and in April 1906, her new outfit included a canvas, a fresh ten-foot by fifty-foot tank and a special coach and baggage car.<sup>12</sup> Clara, who generally appeared on stages rather than at fairs, performed on one occasion in a tank ten feet long, four feet wide and eight feet deep containing salted water and heated to 92 degrees.<sup>13</sup> Allied to this emerging

technology was an improvement in communications and this narrative highlights the international reach of the Beckwith 'brand'. By adopting the name and the essence of Agnes' performances, Clara and Cora perpetuated the 'Beckwith' legend and, in a world that was less globalized than it is today, it was comparatively easy for them to duplicate routines without fear of any consequences.

Agnes also travelled extensively in Europe, promoting the Beckwith name and demonstrating what female swimmers could achieve. In July 1882, she appeared at the Royal Baths in Brussels, when she and Willie performed twenty-seven elements in their programme, which was distinguished by the 'calm harmoniousness' and the complete absence of effort in Agnes' movements. Observers recorded that they had never seen swimming with 'such elegance, vigor, and safety'.<sup>14</sup> In Paris, in February 1886, Agnes performed at the New Circus, alongside brother Charles,<sup>15</sup> and five years later she was at the Sophienbad in Vienna.<sup>16</sup> When she appeared again in Paris in March 1894, she offered 500 francs to anyone able to remain at the bottom of her aquarium without coming to breathe for as long as she did.<sup>17</sup>

Agnes remained the most prominent female swimmer in the universal public imagination around the turn of the twentieth century. Although she was never able to convert this social capital into financial capital, her appearances in America in 1883 and 1887 stimulated imitation and, by adopting the name and appropriating her techniques, Clara and Cora transported her skills across America. It is important to bear in mind, however, that even though Agnes was clearly important to the development of female swimming worldwide this should not be interpreted as part of a conscious effort on her part to improve the situation of women generally. Natationists lived in the present and acted as a function of their history not their future, except in the short term of identifying the next source of income, although this does not minimize the significant impact that natationists made, collectively and individually. Female professionals like Agnes were among the first women to demonstrate the capabilities of the female body, and without their entrepreneurial skills and creativity, swimming for women would have lacked public profile and been unable to initiate or sustain a growth in participation. Through her teaching, her demonstrations and exhibitions, her endurance events and her later orchestration of female aquatic troupes, Agnes was as responsible for the appreciation of swimming among females by the start of the twentieth century as any other individual or organization. Not through some grand design on her part but by her living her life within the constraints and opportunities of her day-to-day world.

Part of that world, of course, was the presence of her father, Professor Beckwith, whose attitude can be summed up by his observation that he considered Agnes as his 'floating capital'.<sup>18</sup> After her marriage, Agnes replaced one patriarchy for another, in the form of husband and business manager, theatre impresario William Taylor. However, if patriarchy is understood as a negotiated relationship between inherently unequal individuals that was fluid enough to allow a degree of active agency,<sup>19</sup> then this might explain how Agnes was able to subsequently develop her entrepreneurial concerns in the form of her own swimming troupes. Sportswomen like Agnes remained involved in sporting entertainments because they provided an alternative to other lifestyles and,

although she might not have appreciated the implications of her activities, she was an innovator who was able to deviate from stereotypical behavioural norms by demonstrating that females had unsuspected abilities and by providing models for others to follow.

*Lucy Pocock Stillwell (1887 – 1958)*

By the turn of the twentieth century, hegemonic middle- and upper-class conceptions of femininity in Britain allowed some degree of physical activity, although the respectable forms this could take remained relatively narrow.<sup>20</sup> While rowing was established as an acceptable leisure activity for middle- and upper-class women prior to the First World War,<sup>21</sup> rowing was understood in this context as leisurely boating, rather than the speed and aggression of competitive racing.<sup>22</sup> Less constrained by notions of respectability, physical activity was less problematic for women outside of the middle and upper classes.<sup>23</sup> Lucy Pocock's parents, Aaron Frederick Pocock and Lucy Pocock, née Vickers, were both from established families of boat builders and watermen,<sup>24</sup> and this not only gave Lucy access to the knowledge and equipment required to develop her sculling, but also situated her in a community in which competitive rowing had legitimacy for women. Lucy was reportedly passionate about rowing 'ever since she could lift an oar',<sup>25</sup> and when her father worked at Eton he would take his four children out rowing, coxing them himself.<sup>26</sup> Even within this context however, Lucy's access to rowing for leisure is unusual, not least because, following the death of her mother and then her step-mother, she had assumed a significant degree of domestic responsibility for her family from an early age.

Lucy appears to have begun racing at the age of eighteen or nineteen, and there is evidence of her winning mixed double sculling events from 1906.<sup>27</sup> She would ultimately become a professional champion, winning the *Daily Mirror* Sculling Championship of the Thames in 1912. This race, a revival of an event held in 1833,<sup>28</sup> was open to female family members of previous winners of the Doggett's Coat and Badge race,<sup>29</sup> and proved highly competitive, with thirty-three women participating. The stipulations for, and reports of, this race express some of the anxieties around women's participation in sporting competition. Family connection to the trade located participants within a particular social and cultural context, minimizing their transgression of feminine ideals and inferring their possession of the knowledge and craft to legitimize their handling of boats. Recruiting former Doggett's winners as coxswains, and renowned sculler Ernest Barry as a judge, ensured a degree of masculine control, as well as representing an opportunity to exploit the popularity of the Doggett's race to publicize this event. The prize was a silver cup valued at fifty pounds, held for a year, and a ten-pound cash prize.<sup>30</sup> The popularity of the final, held before 25,000 spectators, led to a rematch between Lucy and her closest challenger. This was also won by Lucy, who was awarded further prize money and a silver wall mirror. Supplemented by bets placed by her father, these winnings enabled her, and her father and sister, to join her younger brothers, George and Richard, in the USA.

Lucy's brothers had left Britain in 1910 seeking work in Canada but not intending to pursue their family trade.<sup>31</sup> Both, however, were persuaded by Hiram Conibear, the University of Washington (UW) Head Coach, to move to Seattle and build a large fleet of boats for his programme. They established a workshop and began boatbuilding again, before being joined in 1912 by Lucy, their father, and half-sister Kathleen.<sup>32</sup> Shortly after her arrival, Lucy began work as a cook for the men's rowing team at UW,<sup>33</sup> before assuming a role with the UW women's squad for a season in 1913, coaching rowing and the prerequisite skill of swimming. This was not a unique or a new position,<sup>34</sup> although women's involvement in rowing at the university was still in flux. The concerns expressed by UW administration relating to female physical capability mirrored anxieties articulated in Britain; while schools and universities did develop female participation in sports, including rowing, it remained closely watched and carefully managed, and competitive events tended to be intramural and low-profile. Despite Pocock's impression that female rowers in England had more freedom to row competitively,<sup>35</sup> professional openings were more limited in Britain than overseas, and from the second half of the nineteenth century through most of the twentieth, many Britons travelled in search of such opportunities – a trend that, paradoxically, increased the global influence of British rowing while depleting its own human resources domestically, and consequent chances of international success.<sup>36</sup>

Lucy's short tenure at UW, given her reported popularity, remains unexplained, although it has been suggested that her frustration with the limitations on the women's programme at UW was a significant factor in her departure.<sup>37</sup> She appears to have been well respected by Conibear, who described her as 'one of the finest young ladies I have ever known', 'a very industrious & painstaking young lady' and, as an employee, 'most satisfactory in every way'.<sup>38</sup> Despite these positive comments, he does not appear to have used his institutional influence to keep her employed: his support was conditional, and the ideological battle with regard to gender that was playing out at UW was one that he did not choose to fight. Lucy's appointment had been an opportunity to advance his own career by bolstering the reputation of rowing at UW,<sup>39</sup> but with increasing controversy surrounding the programme came greater risk to this reputation, and to his own. For Lucy, women's rowing at UW offered a professional opportunity to pass on her skills and experience, rather than the explicit pursuit of a progressive agenda relating to the sport of rowing, to women in sport, or to female emancipation more broadly. That she was able to pursue this course is indicative of the different conditions within British and American rowing at the time, as well as her individual circumstances: knowledge from within the family trade, her father's willingness to share at least some of it with her, and arguably the fact that she remained single throughout her working and racing life. Even when she died in 1958, obituaries led on her role as a swimming coach, as a wife to James Stillwell, and her later participation in singing, with only passing reference to her achievements in rowing.<sup>40</sup>

With new academic standards and several pioneering women reforming the education system, a shift in focus from domestic ideals to that of academic excellence started to permeate educational institutions towards the end of the nineteenth century.<sup>41</sup> Doris Mathilde Wilkie benefited from this by attending Bedford Physical Training College,<sup>42</sup> one of only a few specialized European teacher training institutions committed to producing female physical education (PE) teachers. Course content included theoretical examination in movement and well-being, whilst practical components included dance, gymnastics, and swimming.<sup>43</sup> Colleges also adapted male team sports, such as lacrosse, hockey and cricket, for females, while netball emerged as a new feminine-specific activity.<sup>44</sup> The sport was praised for its ‘grace and lissomness’,<sup>45</sup> with educators marketing its uniqueness as a female-owned and female-only participation activity.<sup>46</sup> Played as early as 1895, the Ling Physical Education Association (Ling PEA) governed the sport from 1901,<sup>47</sup> with Wilkie establishing herself as a committee member from the mid-1920s before becoming Secretary in 1929. In 1926, she was involved in the process of creating a national governing body,<sup>48</sup> the aim being to provide central administration for the sport and further opportunities for females to participate inside and outside of school. The All England Women’s Net-Ball Association (AEWNA) was subsequently established and an agreed agenda included promoting the sport throughout the United Kingdom and Commonwealth.<sup>49</sup>

Throughout the early AEWNA minutes, Wilkie’s impact is evident. Now a PE lecturer at Bedford, she proposed establishing a London headquarters<sup>50</sup> and she championed developing netball outside educational institutions.<sup>51</sup> As an active member of several sporting and physical education committees, she furthered the AEWNA agenda with other sport networks. Exemplifying the ‘new woman’ within education, Wilkie positioned herself to advance the PE curriculum, women’s sporting opportunities, and the educational status of women. Bedford College staff were founding members of the Gymnastics Teacher’s Suffrage Society (1909)<sup>52</sup> and Wilkie’s attitudes inevitably reflected the female-dominated world in which she operated. Administratively, she was instrumental in developing AEWNA policies, rules, training and accreditation of umpires, leading the umpiring sub-group from 1929. She wrote instructive and tactical books for coaches and schoolteachers, as well as the AEWNA publication *Hints to Umpires*,<sup>53</sup> and when discussions of formal coaching qualifications began, Wilkie became part of the first testing panels.<sup>54</sup> By 1937, netball was considered ‘a playing field of the future...[serving] as great impetus in the Physical Fitness Campaign...and should give many [females] something to strive for in the betterment of the world’.<sup>55</sup>

In the post-War era, a rebrand of the national governing body, now the All England Netball Association (AENA), coincided with a change in leadership and governance. Internationalization of the sport became a priority with Wilkie promoting this agenda as the newly appointed chairwoman. The 1951 Festival of Britain validated the national appeal of netball, with the AENA tournament attracting over 900 entries. Schools and colleges, youth and adult clubs, and junior and senior country teams were

well represented, as were women's service teams, national leagues and international netballing organizations. Large audiences gathered for coaching and umpiring dissemination events, historical re-enactments documenting netball's evolution, and international contests between England, Wales, Scotland, New Zealand and Australia.<sup>56</sup> Wilkie supported the organization and officiating of such events, as well encouraging the further advancement of AENA, its rules and activities into the international arena.<sup>57</sup>

This was not a new concept. The Ling PEA and the AEWNA had long desired to develop netball into an internationally recognized sport and a demonstration between an English team and Randolph College, Texas, was staged in Vienna in June 1931.<sup>58</sup> Due to the difficulties experienced in agreeing playing rules, the AEWNA encouraged discussion surrounding international governance<sup>59</sup> and the 1947 AENA 'coming of age' exhibition saw netball being demonstrated under the varying rules played throughout the world.<sup>60</sup> Wilkie encouraged home nation competitions and was an advocate for international exchange, providing financial support for a South African netball tour.<sup>61</sup> The Australian netball tour of England in 1956 was critical in stimulating international regulation, not only by providing an opportunity for international competition but also for demonstrations and lectures about the coaching and tactics used by different nations.

The AENA had been corresponding with world netball organizations about developing an international code since 1949. After the 1956 tour, further communications from the AENA strongly recommended that the 'earliest possible action be taken to establish an international rules discussion', with representatives from Australia, Ceylon, New Zealand, South Africa and the West Indies attending the AENA rules conference in June 1957.<sup>62</sup> However, the final version of international netball took time to develop, with further exhibition games, coaching and umpiring workshops, lectures and conferences with touring teams used to implement and agree the final rules. In August 1960, an international playing code was accepted and the International Federation of Women's Basketball and Netball was formed.<sup>63</sup> The AENA was recognized for its efforts in ensuring co-operation between the netballing nations and they selected the first officers of the Federation and hosted the first world tournament. Now president of AENA, Wilkie guided the organization in the adoption of the new international netball rules for domestic competition, ensuring all schools, clubs and associations adhered to the international code.<sup>64</sup>

The popularity of netball increased, and it became the largest female participation sport,<sup>65</sup> although Wilkie's involvement declined as her health deteriorated. She died in April 1963, four months before the inaugural netball world tournament, leaving a significant fortune unclaimed in probate.<sup>66</sup> Her involvement in the physical education culture had fostered strong feminist tendencies, and, like many of her netballing contemporaries, Wilkie had dedicated herself to education and female advancement, rather than to a traditionally prescribed family life.<sup>67</sup> However, whilst the AENA lauded Wilkie's life and championed her as a 'source of inspiration',<sup>68</sup> her impact and achievements were only recognized within the confines of the organization, as was the case with many similar female sporting pioneers, whose stories have died with them. Uncovering these narratives is important to fully understand the complexities of the modern sporting environment.<sup>69</sup>



## *The Female Sporting Experience*

The sporting lives of these three individuals demonstrate that British women from different cultural and class backgrounds, as well as from different time periods, were able to influence, inspire and lead the development of sports on an international level. Each individual had her own motives and drivers, and their successes can each be judged differently by bearing in mind their motivations. Of the three, Wilkie alone actively advocated for netball as a tool for female empowerment, and worked in the administration of the sport to this end. Pocock and Beckwith on the other hand were less influenced by ideology than by pragmatic concerns and their particular sporting lives were partially driven by financial imperatives, by a family trade of one kind or another, and partially by love of the sport. As a result, their passion, enthusiasm and, importantly, legitimate knowledge, helped them to create opportunities to pursue their ambitions. However, in all three cases, these women were operating within social contexts where the sporting domain was coded as a masculine. There was little consideration given to accommodating female athletes, and opponents of female athleticism consistently argued that vigorous exercise corrupted a woman's moral intellect, disfigured her physique and eroded her reproductive capacity.<sup>70</sup> Careful negotiation of female respectability and potentially transgressive behaviour is therefore a key interpretive continuity between their three life courses.

Beckwith and Pocock shared some important characteristics: their patronymic surname was a valuable commodity for their individual achievements; their sporting exploits had initially been facilitated by men; and the men surrounding them often remained the major beneficiaries from their efforts. Agnes was driven by the commercial needs of her family and she drew on her brother's global reputation, and his presence alongside her on many of her tours, to reinforce her credibility as a female aquatic performer. Pocock had originally pursued the sport without financial imperative (despite some financial gain), but on entering a more professionalized rowing environment in the USA her knowledge and skills became a marketable commodity and provided a necessary income stream. Both women adapted the patterns of their participation in sport overseas in order to gain acceptance, and to generate financial return – a process facilitated by their independence from organizational structures. Wilkie, by contrast, engaged more overtly with such structures. Her international impact was made not by personal intervention but by the dissemination of her ideas through organizational developments, and her championing of women's participation in the national arena encouraged others to establish their own international connections. Her work was also largely outside of the commercial sphere, and the importance of promoting herself was secondary to promoting her sport. For Pocock and Beckwith the two were heavily interdependent. The commercialized sporting environment in America was undoubtedly a factor in this and represented both a facilitator of their careers and a compelling reason for men to maintain control over their activities. Yet it also speaks to their motivations: for Beckwith and Pocock sport was a vehicle, a means of achieving other goals like financial stability and family reputation. For Wilkie, sport was the destination.

International travel presented opportunities for all three women and, irrespective of their motivations and ultimate impact, each was involved in the expansion of their sport beyond the boundaries of the United Kingdom. For Beckwith and Pocock, their location in a small family unit, outside of sporting governance, allowed them to adapt to their circumstances, and their ability to craft a professional image was increased by being in an international environment. For example, Pocock and her brothers were able to utilize the somewhat tenuous family connection to Eton to bolster their reputation overseas in terms of skills and respectability. Wilkie, however, was actively engaged in promoting consistency in sport, through regulation and administration. Internationalization was an explicit objective, and an object in itself: whereas the Beckwiths and the Pococks approached different countries as new commercial markets, Wilkie sought to drive engagement with the sport, and to establish structures that could operate independently of her involvement.

Wilkie was the most proactive of these three women in building her sport distinctly from her own place within it. She was also the most collaborative with other women, and the most independent of patriarchal influence. Her narrative highlights the value to women's sport of the committee, a collaboration of similar minds that encouraged progress. Several female sports administrators consolidated their position by serving on committees in different sports to present a united front.<sup>71</sup> In contrast to the independent, family-driven networks that underpinned the Beckwith and Pocock narratives, Wilkie can be located in a bigger network of sporting women, an emergent community of female sports administrators. In all three cases, however, these women found a suitable niche for their talents, one that enabled them not only to further their own agendas but also eventually contributed to the development of their sports within the constraints of their spatial, temporal and social environments. In the process, they thus provided opportunities for other females to enter these sporting spaces, both directly and indirectly, thereby creating the potential for future positive changes.

The greater ease with which women could enter sports without an established history of male participation is a familiar narrative: in the context of team sport, for example, it was easier to construct a different sporting identity for women in lacrosse or hockey (or indeed, netball), than to legitimize their participation in a masculine discipline like rugby.<sup>72</sup> Additionally, protected by the location of the sport in educational institutions, primarily the women's colleges, Wilkie was operating in a relatively safe space for women's sport with more extreme patriarchal anxiety being directed elsewhere. The mixed-sex educational environment that Pocock worked in, coupled with the explicit coding of rowing as a highly masculine sport, proved more equivocal. The construction of respectable rowing for women as boating or style rowing rather than competitive racing would endure, both in England and in the USA, and Lucy's pursuit of a competitive agenda was tempered by university administration and a pressure to conform to gendered sporting expectation. The American universities may have been more receptive to professional sporting models than their British counterparts, but they showed similar anxieties relating to gender at an institutional level, and women's access to rowing remained highly contested and subordinate to men's, at least until the

introduction of Title IX in 1972. For Agnes, in contrast, the early acceptance of swimming as an acceptable activity for women facilitated her ability to pursue a commercial career and to make a significant impact in raising awareness and encouraging participation both at home and abroad.

### *Conclusion*

The writing of sports history has largely reflected traditional male hegemonic perspectives on sport with women being either omitted or marginalized in the historiography.<sup>73</sup> More recent scholarship has recognized that sport is a thoroughly gendered field and, as one that has always mirrored societal perspectives and values, constitutes an important area of study for scholars of sport and gender alike. This paper has argued that the absence of women in these narratives is the result of both historical prejudice and methodological bias, and the latter – the tendency of sport history to focus on formal sporting structures and organizations, which more adequately address male sporting practice – is counterbalanced here by using life course analysis. It suggests that while the impact of individual women on their sport may have been through sports administration, it may have assumed other important forms as well: popularity, public visibility, local advocacy.

Closer examination of the lives of these three women has illustrated the contradictory impulses of their social and sporting milieus, and the extent to which they were able to navigate these impulses and provoke change. It has suggested that the familiar narratives around international dissemination of sport from Britain are limited, and that the work and life courses of individual women in sport can offer different and valuable perspectives on sporting history. The inconsistent restrictions on women's sporting endeavours, varying according to location, class, community and the sport, as evidenced here, are reflective of the opposing discourses surrounding female physical activity from the mid-nineteenth century onwards. This highly contingent nature of patriarchal permissions for women in sport makes life course analysis a valuable methodological tool, allowing for more nuanced consideration of the factors that facilitated and hindered their participation in sport. Future research, utilizing biographical approaches that seem to be particularly useful in studying women's sporting histories, should consider the value of these factors in spreading individual sports, and in building greater legitimacy for women's sport more widely, in Europe, America, and the British Commonwealth.

## NOTES

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- 6 Gori Gigliola and J.A. Mangan, *Sport and the Emancipation of European Women: The Struggle for Self-fulfilment* (London: Routledge, 2016); See also Carol Osborne and Fiona Skillen, 'Forum: Women in Sport', *Women's History Review* 24 (2015) 5; Carol Osborne and Fiona Skillen, *Women in Sports History* (London: Routledge, 2014); Florys Castan-Vicente, 'The International Association of Physical Education and Sport for Girls and Women between 1949 and the 1970s', *Sport in History* 37 (2017) 3, 353-377.
- 7 See, for example, Richard Holt, *Sport and the British* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989); Derek Birley, *Land of Sport and Glory* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995); Peter McIntosh, *Sport in Society* (London: West London Press, 1987).
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- 11 *Manitoba Free Press*, 6 January 1917, 14.
- 12 *Police Gazette*, 25 June 1904, 2; *New York Clipper*, 2 April 1906, 270.
- 13 *Lewiston Evening Journal*, 31 July 1893, 2.
- 14 *Independence Belge*, 17 July 1882, 2; *Meuse*, 19 July 1882, 2; *Secho Du Parlement*, 20 July 1882, 2.
- 15 *Le Temps*, 20 February 1886, 5.
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- 17 *Le Gaulois*, 11 March 1894, 4; *La Lanterne*, 4 March 1894, 3-4.
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