

# Paths followed by sportswomen in Portugal: asymmetries, resistances and possibilities

*Angelita Alice Jaeger\**

*Paula Botelho Gomes\*\**

*Paula Silva\*\*\**

*Silvana Vilodre Goellner\*\*\*\**

**Abstract:** This study has been based upon the theoretical field of Gender Studies. Twenty-one female athletes and former athletes that perform technical and managerial functions in the area of sports in Portugal were interviewed. Three significant units emerged. The analysis of these units allowed the identification of developments in the widening participation of sportswomen , despite the fact that women have to both diversify their functions and accept work conditions that differ from those available to men. Rejecting the position of victims, the women interviewed have converted those asymmetries into challenges and have also suggested actions to encourage, widen and consolidate female participation in all levels of sports.

**Keywords:** Women. Sports. Gender identity. Work of women.

## 1 INITIAL CONSIDERATIONS

The year of 2007 was designated by the European Parliament and the European Union Council (EU) as the “European Year of Equal Opportunities for All”.<sup>1</sup> Considering

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\* Professor at the Physical Education and Sports Center for the Federal University of Santa Maria. Santa Maria, RS, Brazil. E-mail: ajaeger@smail.ufsm.br

\*\* Professor at the Faculty of Sports Sciences of the University of Porto. Porto, Portugal. E-mail: botgomes@fade.up.pt

\*\*\* Professor at the Faculty of Sports Sciences of the University of Porto. Porto, Portugal. E-mail: psilva@fade.up.pt

\*\*\*\* Professor at the Physical Education School of the Federal University of a Rio Grande do Sul. Porto Alegre, RS, Brazil. E-mail: goellner@terra.com.br

1 Ruling n. 771/2006/CE of the European Parliament and Council of 16 May 2006, establishing 2007 as European Year of Equal Opportunities for All (2007). Available at: <[http://eur-lex.europa.eu/smartapi/cgi/sga\\_doc?smartapi!celexplus!prod!DocNumber&lg=pt&type\\_doc=Decision&an\\_doc=2006&nu\\_doc=771](http://eur-lex.europa.eu/smartapi/cgi/sga_doc?smartapi!celexplus!prod!DocNumber&lg=pt&type_doc=Decision&an_doc=2006&nu_doc=771)> Accessed on: 24 Apr 2007.

the cultural multiplicity of the EU, different actions were proposed with the purpose of creating the right framework to build a more egalitarian society. In Portugal, this theme has been part of the government agenda for over a decade. With the purpose of minimizing inequalities in the Portuguese society, the “Global Plan for Equal Opportunities” was designed in 1997; in 1998, the Committee for Women’s Rights Equal Opportunity” was set up. In 2003, the II National Equity Plan<sup>2</sup> was launched, and on March 2007, the Council of Ministers determined the creation of a set of new actions that comprised the III National Plan for Gender Equity, III National Plan Against Domestic Violence, and the I National Plan Against Human Trafficking.

It cannot be denied that these actions foster advancements for the greater democratization of the Portuguese society. However, according to Pinto (2007), in face of other EU countries, Portugal is still at the early investment stage in terms of projects that foster equal opportunities, where its actual endeavors are the drafting of laws, which does not guarantee that the required changes to the asymmetric track record between men and women are put in place.

The aforementioned asymmetries are identified and studied under different instances. The sports scenario is one of the milieus where inequality between men and women is still strong. Therefore, for sixty years conferences, debates and meetings<sup>3</sup> have been held internationally to discuss the situation of sportswomen. These discussions yielded documents<sup>4</sup> that encourage the creation and implementation of

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2 Available at: <<http://cidm.madbug.com/?TopLevelID=7>>. Accessed on: 25 Apr 2007.

3 Examples: Congresses of the International Physical Education and Sports Association for Girls and Women; UN World Conferences on/or for Women; Saudi Arabia Conference on Women and Sports; Pan-American Physical Education, Sports and Recreation Congress; to mention but a few (CARVALHO; CRUZ, 2007).

4 Examples: European Charter on Sports for All (1976); International Charter on Physical Education and Sports – Resolution on greater participation of women in sports (1981); European Union – European Parliament Resolution on Women and Sports (1987); Brighton Declaration (1994); Beijing Declaration and Action; Resolution from the First World Conference of the International Olympic Committee on Women and Sports (1996); European resolution on harassment and sexual abuse prevention for women, youngsters

strategies to eliminate the differences between men and women in accessing sports, expanding the insertion and participation of the latter in different venues and functions that are part of the sports milieu, both as a recreation and educational scope, and professional as well. One of these documents is the Brighton Declaration on Women and Sport (1994)<sup>5</sup>, which is one of the most important, as it encourages correcting the distortions in sports via actions that would drive the higher participation of women at all “levels, functions and levels of authority”. When the International Olympic Committee (IOC) became aware of this Declaration in 1994, it decided that one of the goals of every institution under their norms should comprise at least 10% women by 2000 and 20% by 2005. It also decided to hold the World Conference on Women and Sports every four years in order to monitor how these actions were being carried out, establishing targets focusing on “improving the situation of sportswomen”, expanding the scope of the performance field and enabling women to improve their levels of intervention (CARVALHO; CRUZ, 2007).

Despite the fact that the action had great proposal merits, little or almost nothing was actually done in Portugal, as the local Olympic Committee did not even comply with the recommendations made by IOC (CRUZ 2001). Discouraging results were also observed in studies that show that in Portugal women are under-represented in sports, are little encouraged to practice it and to remain in the field, are awarded lower prizes than men and have little access to managing position and are not covered enough by the media (MARI-VOÉT, 2001, 2003; SILVA; CARVALHO, 2001; SANTOS, 2001; RIBEIRO, 2006, CRUZ, 2007). Within the context of Modern Olympic Games, the participation of Portuguese athletes did not

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and children in sports (2000); Recommendation 1701 – Discrimination of women and girls in sports activities (2005), to mention but a few (CARVALHO; CRUZ, 2007).

5 The Brighton Declaration was approved by the 280 delegates from the 82 countries representing governmental and non-governmental organizations, national Olympic committees, national and international federations, learning and research institutions and throughout the world (CARVALHO; CRUZ, 2007).

increase significantly. In Barcelona (1996) there were 24 athletes; in Sidney (2000) 13; and in Athens (2004) 17. This scenario remained unchanged in 2008 (Beijing). According to Cruz, Silva & Botelho (2006), the new projects called “Beijing 2008” and “Olympic Hope” did little to actually lead to major transformations in the sports milieu of Furthermore, Of the countries under the European Community, Portugal has “the lowest rate of female participation in sports, as athletes or managers” (GRAÇA, 2006, p. 12).

The above data shows that the situation of sports-women in Portugal is gender-oriented in terms of their access and permanence, both as athletes and as managers. We second the words of Hall (1990) when he states that sports are historically produced, socially built and culturally defined and for this very reason can be transformed. Within this perspective we purport that the individual actions of many athletes, women's movements and scholars that study feminism have denounced, questioned and shaken the male domination of sports. All these actions combined have gradually transformed gender relationship within this context.

Considering that the sports milieu is a privileged venue where gender relationships can be scrutinized, the purpose of this study is to evaluate the conditions of performance of female athletes and former athletes that hold technical and managerial positions in the sports milieu in Portugal. This theme is justified by the following points: a) the lack of studies on this theme in Portugal; b) a comprehensive set of resolutions and recommendations regulating sports in Portugal; c) the difficulties faced by government institutions to implement actions that address banishing gender inequalities in sports; d) the perception that despite all the gridlocks, women overcome hurdles, face challenges and fight to enhance their participation at different levels and functions in sports.

## 2 METHODOLOGY

This investigation is characterized as a qualitative study in that “it provides to the investigator the description and interpretation of the representations and meanings that a social group imparts to its daily experience” (MOLINA NETO, 1999, p. 12). To collect information, we carried out semi-structured interviews,<sup>6</sup> in that this tool was conducive to knowing the aspects of the interviewees’ personal and professional life. The interviews were organized as a script of topics with key sentences that were used as *aide memoirs* in order to monitor interview development (GASKELL, 2000). Script flexibility enabled interviewees<sup>7</sup> and interviewers to better explore the themes that arose during the process without losing their focus. All interviews were carried out face-to-face after informed consent was given, whereby they were taped and later transcribed in a report.

Considering the objective of this study, 21 women<sup>8</sup> were interviewed, which were athletes in Portugal as coaches, sports coordinators, referees, managers and technical directors.

QSR Nvivo software was used to systemize empirical material, which helps to organize and file texts, but that should not be misinterpreted as a data analysis tool, as admonished by Kelle (2000). As recommended by Patton (2002), collected material was classified by meaning. Recurrent themes were identified when the material was assessed, which were used as analysis units. Summarized in small sentences, these units expressed the focus under which the women’s statements were organized. Three lines stood out: a) the many different paths of

6 According to Trivinos (1987, p. 146), semi-structured interview is hereunder generally deemed as one that “is based on certain basic questions supported by theories and hypothesis of interest to the study, which provide and comprehensive field of questioning, the fruit of new hypothesis that arise as the questions are answered”.

7 The identity of the interviewees was protected; however, they are identified in the text according to their role in the Portuguese sports milieu.

8 Essas mulheres participaram de um projeto intitulado “Agir para Mudar”, realizado pela Associação Portuguesa Mulheres e Desporto (APMD), financiado pelo Fundo Social Europeu. Disponível em: [www.mulheresdesporto.org.pt](http://www.mulheresdesporto.org.pt)

sports-women; b) asymmetries and hurdles faced by sports-women; c) the resistance suffered and suggestions given by women to improve sports in Portugal.

The analysis of empiric sources consulted for this study showed that these themes are interfaced, e.g. “[...] if one terminology were to be absorbed by another, they would continuously be referred back to its origin” (CHAUÍ, 2002 *apud* FISCHER, 2005, p.138), thus creating analysis units and their unfolding aspects.

### **3 THE MULTIPLE VENUES OF SPORTS FOR WOMEN IN PORTUGAL**

The first category ensuing from the assessment of interviews addressed the different types of experience that women accumulated over the years of participating in sports. Different and varied routes were taken, both in terms of body-related and sports practices, and positions and functions each held within a sports organization. This clear multiplicity of venues indicates that investments made in sports not only comprise victories, success, fame and money, especially in the case of women. They need to create alternatives in order to face the difficulties posed by modalities that more often than not are undervalued in terms of incorporating changes; to deal with lack of investment and learn how to negotiate their permanence in a field where contradictions abound.

Interviews revealed that many women experienced diverse and different unstable situation, doubts and barriers in sports. All of them mentioned that they joined a given body-related or sports practice based on their preference of a special modality, which took place in school or clubs where they went with their family. When these women were still girls, they moved from one modality to another and/or changed clubs until they reached the results whereby they would remain in a given venue or modality. In this sense, their experience in sports were diverse and many women dedicated themselves to

more than one sports modality as athletes. They are former athletes or still compete in handball, wakeboarding, judo, gymnastics, athletism, basketball, hockey, futsal and swimming. Some reached Olympic Game levels; others played in other open games and competitions, or are still competing in international, national and regional events.

Professional instability in the lives of these athletes was evidenced under different venues and statements, which increased their attendance of different high performance sports clubs. Some lost their training venue because the managers of those institutions closed down the club or decided to terminate the modality for women in order to invest in men athletes; some changed sport modality because it was more cost-effective.

Of the many difficulties reported by the interviewees, the most common was that they needed to work in order to afford training costs, which demanded time and dedication to other sport-related fields and functions, as well as training with their team. Many could not cover their expenses competing, and for this reason had to work in order to have minimal financial conditions to keep on training, pay for travel expenses, to buy equipment and pay for their upkeep. This situation was noted both in the interviews with former athletes and statements given by athletes that are still competing. Some reported that they would take on different roles, trained children's team of both genders, organized competitions, gave classes in schools and performed a variety of other activities to improve their wages. This situation is different from what male trainers experience. One interviewee said:

For one and a half hours of training I get there 15 minutes before and leave 15 minutes after it's finished; that adds up to another half hour – two hours every week. It's not enough, the pay is not". "There's no logical comparison (with men); anyway, most of us don't make anything with women's futsal." (Futsal athlete and coach).

The interaction between sports activities and functions paves the way for women to continue working in this field. Interviews show that their permanence in the sports milieu was built via many changes of direction. Moreover, their familiarity and taste for sports were the decisive elements for them to continue pursuing a sport-related activity.

When focusing on sports modalities and functions, we noted that in most cases interviewees reported on a lack of linearity between the life of the athlete her professional career. In other words, they are seldom former athletes of one modality and later become coaches or managers under that same modality. What was evidenced, for example was: former handball athlete and current soccer coach; wakeboarding athlete, athlete and coach and rugby coordinator; former athletics athlete and current swimming coach etc. Changing modalities and/or function leaves a deep imprint in the professional performance of sportswomen women in Portugal.

Isabel Cruz (2001) notes that despite the constant pressures from the Portuguese Association of Sportswomen on the Portuguese government, norms still remain the same as they were ten years ago. The lack of investments in sports, the lack of acknowledgement and visibility, and also the inequality between women and men is still very strong in the sports milieu of Portugal – which was all noted in this study. This reality points out the fact that these are not momentary issues but rather, that they have been part of the life experience of all interviewees, as shown in the excerpts below:

I was 10 when I started playing tennis; they told me that I didn't stand a chance because I was a girl... Then I switched to basketball. They said I didn't have much chance because I was a woman. At that time I was playing with two guys – they stayed on and I left. (Former athlete and coach de basketball coach).

I believe that in terms of work acknowledgement men and institutions find it hard to recognize that women have done a

good job when it comes to handing out prizes – so far it hasn't happened. Every year the Swimming Association of Porto gives prizes and I have never received one. (Former athletism athlete and swimming manager).

When deciding to pursue their professional lives in sports, women joined venues that were mostly 'all men only', jumping cultural hurdles and crossing gender barriers. Being an athlete, especially in soccer, hockey and judo, for example, required from these women more than merely learning the techniques – they needed a measure of rebelliousness and courage to go beyond the limits historically assigned to women, in these and other venues, showing that despite the obstacles, these roads can be transformed.

#### **4 ASYMMETRIES AND OTHER OBSTACLES**

Interview assessment revealed that despite the long experience of some women in the Portuguese sports scenario, none held positions in the higher echelons of national sports. Only two women were in a management position: one as the president of an all-women swim club and the other as the vice-director of a coed basketball club.

After a decade since the Brighton Declaration was inaugurated, it still seems that there is a long way to go before the IOC goals are met on the participation of women in Olympic Committees. We identified that of the 28 Federations associated with the Olympic Committee of Portugal<sup>9</sup>, only two are headed by women. There are also 31 non-Olympic Committees with only one woman in a management position.

This situation does not happen only in Portugal. In Germany, Pfister & Radtke (2007) observed that 96% of the heads of Federations were men, who also hold over 80% of

<sup>9</sup>  
at:<<http://www.comiteolimpicoportugal.pt/conteudo.php?page=federacoes>>. Accessed on 12 Nov 2007.

Data

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key positions in high performance sports and financial function. Aspects that limit the participation of women in leading positions of sports organizations are: lack of a close relationship with and lack of professional prestige outside the sports milieu, lack of family support to be involved with sports, and the fact that their significant other and/or children are not involved in sports. These aspects are similar and reinforce some of the abovementioned reasons given by the interviewees when they report on the difficulties of being involved with sports.

Being a woman is very difficult because you have a regular job and children, and usually you also have to do house chores. Conciliating all these aspects is very difficult, especially if your husband is not associated with or holds a position in the sports milieu. (Former athletism athlete and swim coach)

I find it strange that there are only a few women and that only a handful is willing to take on this role (sports manager). I believe that our generation is not ready to take on this role because we still live in a male dominated world. (Former swimmer and basketball coach)

If on the one hand the difficulty in conciliating sports and family life is a hurdle to that needs to be overcome by women, on the other hand, often times women take on the decision of giving up their career in sports and embrace another profession in the face of the difficulties in working in this field and are pressed to join the traditional professions earmarked for them. According to Shaw (2007), within the business sector women are considered more efficient when team work and advisory skills are required, and as skilled negotiators; however, these very features are undervalued in the case of sports management. Strength, aggressiveness and competitiveness deemed as traits required for a successful career in sports for men are considered essential requirements to lead sports organizations.

However, women are not outranked by men only in terms of high management positions; this same scenario is repeated in both male and female teams, especially in relation to performance sports. According to Mourão (2003), men justify their resistance to the presence of women as coaches for high performance sports stating that there are some hindering factors, e.g. travelling for competitions, long periods of training and difficulty in balancing personal and professional life. Fasting (2001) believes that the higher number of men over women as coaches is due to the traditional social relationship system that determines roles that should be played by men and women. Furthermore, the representation of the sports milieu as a venue where men perform and display their masculinity favors the perception and easy identification by society that coaches are usually men, which leads to doubting whether women would be competent in this position. These are some of the statements given by interviewees:

I had a conflicting situation with a parent; there were rules that had to be followed in practice. He insulted me for doing it..., and then he said I should be at home doing the dishes and house chores. I never said a word. (Futsal athlete and coach)

My experience as coach includes giggles and whispering behind my back "ah! A woman!" and they try to bamboozle. But if you don't let them get away with it they soon change their tune. It is easier for a man than a woman to have a career in hockey. (Hockey athlete and coach)

The statements above show that there is a visible difficulty for women to become coaches in the sports milieu, which traditionally is taken by men. Furthermore, both in sports traditionally associated with men (soccer) and sports associated with women (gymnastics) we identified men coaching teams of individual athletes. Women coaches hold secondary positions, where they are responsible for children and/or teen teams. This context corroborates the analyses

carried out by Shaw (2007) that states that most of the training for competitions is associated with masculinity, while teaching sports skills is more associated with femininity. Such representations have historically created and reaffirmed asymmetries between men and women in sports.

Despite the fact that some interviewees participated as athletes in international competition, including the Olympic Games, none coached a high performance team. This seems to be a men-only venue, maybe because women do not fight for their right to join that job market, maybe because they fall short of meeting technical standards, knowledge and experience. Although there are no written impediments or legislation to keep women from holding high management positions in sports, there is a ‘glass ceiling’ that is almost impossible to overcome (PFISTER; RADTKE, 2007).

According to the interviewees, women’s participation in coaching high performance teams in Portugal is another hurdle to be overcome as men are invited to coach these teams. As soon as a male athlete is outstanding he is invited to coach a men’s team, a privileged position that provides optimum work environment and wages. Another situation of inequality identified by women is related to the undervaluing of sports practiced by women compared to men and their secondary position in sports organizations. The excerpts below confirm these issues.

He started coaching women’s teams and his good work was acknowledged and he was called to coach the men’s team; he’s a very competent level 4 futsal coach; he’s a physical education teacher and he wanted to do something else as he wasn’t able to grow as a coach of a women’s team. So, what happens? The better qualified coach switches from women’s teams to men’s. (Futsal athlete and coach)

At a certain point I was invited to manage the position of the club’s executive director of the club; I was just an athlete and would keep

the same functions. In other words, I made the same money as in the sports school but had more functions, and there was another guy that was going to be appointed executive director that was there for a long time, and age played a role. We had the same level of functions; they proposed that I would keep on earning 80 contos per month and he made 200 contos. (Former handball athlete, coach and manager)

Interviews also showed that the differences between men and women are obviously not only in the clubs but also in Federations that invest more in men's teams than in women's. This type of imbalance has caused a vicious circle that is difficult to break. In other words: higher investments in male teams/athletes yield better results, which in turn attracts media visibility and sponsors; the latter then invest more money in teams and/or athletes, which consequently have better training conditions and wages. Ultimately, there are countless factors that together are favorable for men in the Portuguese sports system. According to the interviewees:

If there were the same conditions for women's teams as for men's, for sure athletes would dedicate themselves more; I know very good athletes that gave up because they had to choose between playing and studying... and it's the same with being a coach... the best coaches don't want to deal with women's teams and have to carry the ball on their shoulders. (Former handball athlete, coach and manager)

In their statements, women noted that scarce professional recognition is not evidenced only in the low wages they are paid, more often than not but also in the difference between the amount of prizes given to different sports modalities and levels. When studying this difference, Santos (2001) affirms that in this case there is a breach of the right for equity set forth under the Portuguese Constitution and the Brighton Declaration. Based on this evidence, it is recommended that Portuguese society should implement a

'positive action' in favor of women, even under unfavorable conditions, which would provide the same type of recognition than men.

When putting in place this kind of action, the author believes that centuries of unfair treatment would be corrected. Although this suggestion could give rise to controversies, it should be noted that this action is directly related to the profound inequality between conditions for training and working between sportsmen and sportswomen, especially in relation to resources invested in either. These difficulties have rendered the participation of women in the sports milieu unfeasible, as such adverse conditions force them to leave this field in search of better work opportunities, professional recognition and remuneration that is compatible with their function in other industries.

Further to the abovementioned aspects, interviewees mentioned the close relationship between sports and youth, marriage and the decision to invest in family life where there is no room for sports. Furthermore, the difficulty in conciliating education with training and low wages also influenced women in their decision to pursue or leave this work field. Ribeiro (2006, p. 114) affirms that sportswomen also have to cope with "smaller prizes in sports or the lack of financial backing/wages for sportswomen, or lower wages for coaches compared with their male peers".

The sports milieu is highly hierarchy-based and male oriented. Moreover, it is characterized by deep gender inequalities, where women suffer the ensuing burden. Despite the large number of asymmetries that sportswomen must overcome, there are new possibilities on the horizon, whereby women can be on top of their own positions and conquests, as they realize that in this struggle for power the sports venue is a 'work in progress', and that is the reason why they fight to take an active part in it and to go even further – to conquer it!

## 5 FROM RESISTANCE TO SUGGESTIONS FOR SPORTS IMPROVEMENT

Despite the recurrence of situations of asymmetry between men and women in sports identified in the interview analysis, interviewees did not take on the position of victims in a system obviously controlled by men. In the many narratives, particular resistance strategies were mentioned, all of which were employed to conquer their place or to guarantee the position they already hold. Under this study, the meaning of resistance is based on the theory by Michel Foucault (2005, p. 91), mainly where he affirms that “where there is power there is resistance”. When there is resistance it generates displacement, breaches and changes conducive to modify the manner in which sports are created and constituted, and opens new possibilities for men and women in this milieu.

Taking into account the assumption that the experiences of men and women stem from previous ones, we agree with Markula (2005, p. 5) that suggests that women's resistance when facing oppression is directly associated with “specific structures of their gender identity”, which are built according to different social circumstances. To this end, we selected some extracts from interviews stating that traditional Portuguese society was to a certain point responsible for hindering their participation in sports. By rejecting their role as victims, these women take on risks and are bold enough to chart their own routes, as presented below:

[And they would ask] [...] seriously, you are a hockey player? Wow, this is such a violent sport for a girl! But that's how it always is. Because it's a modality that people consider very tough and aggressive, which is not associated with female traits. (Hockey player and coach)

I hear some things that are said but I take them just as horseplay, or at least that's what I'd like to believe they are. In their mindset, to be a man is to act as a typical sexist

manly-man that doesn't mind cursing, and that women should be annoyed when she is called names. It doesn't get to me and it won't! It's hilarious, honestly, sometimes I just feel like laughing in the person's face! And because I'm a woman and we're so few out there it's even better, knowing that they even try to get rid of the few sportswomen, but that doesn't work with me. (Former hockey player and coach, and referee)

Because we still live in a sexist world, women sometimes do not feel motivated to go ahead and try, maybe because it's their nature or for cultural reasons. And if for some reason things don't work out, they don't want to stick their necks out, to go the extra mile because they lack confidence. They don't risk taking the first step to be able to show [...] we can do it because we're no different from the rest. (Former swimmer and basketball coach)

We also noted that the interviewees did not mention meaningful breaches or transformations, but rather small day-by-day situations of resistance, i.e. taking a step into the unknown and being bold in what they do, sticking to their decisions and being heard in the meetings of the Federation and clubs, ignoring snide remarks, working harder than most men, and turning discrimination into encouragement to overcome their foibles. These are some of the strategies used by women to resist the constant pressure they must endure to remain in the sports field. Foucault (2005) reminds us that there are seldom "major radical ruptures" that mean a great revolution of values, behavior and even lifestyles; what is usually observed are small types of resistance that are possible and necessary at a specific moment, depending on their conditions to be carried out.

Eight participants at some point mentioned some instance where they had to show some resistance, which does not mean to say that the other interviewees did not display the same behavior in their lives. Perhaps this fact did not occur to

them while they were being interviewed. Acknowledging inequality is one of the drives to fight for better work conditions and to broaden their scope of participation in different sport modalities. Interviewees stated that first and foremost, their fight is personal only to become public and collective at a later time:

And actually it is true that people fail to pursue what they want. I was committed and people engaged me, and so I face challenges and set my own challenges, because I don't see any difference. For sure there are some hurdles that I need to overcome that men don't have to, but I'm willing to do it, I'm willing to fight for what I want. I believe in what I do and I believe that when you're competent you can create your own space. (Futsal and soccer athlete and coach)

Now, in terms of the swimming milieu, at first they would see us (two women managers) as aliens, from another world, because it was still a male-dominated environment, as coaches and managers. We were the first, and two at the same time! And they come in pairs! (laughter) Women are beginning to join in. (Former athletism athlete and swimming manager)

Resisting in a territory that is not usually female-oriented has had effects on the number of women that participated in the sports milieu. As their numbers increased, women changed their perception of the sports milieu as a basically male venue, doing away with this notion and weakening the barriers. Despite the common notion that sports are no longer exclusive to men, it is still far from being gender equitable. To this end, it is necessary to acknowledge that the fight for women in sports is ongoing and on a daily basis because of unbalanced gender relations. For this reason, just the fact alone that women remain in sports shows a certain measure of resistance. It is noted that some hurdles have been overcome, but there is yet much to be done.

To this end, interviewees suggested actions they believed to be mandatory to expand the scope of women's insertion and participation at different levels of sports in Portugal, e.g. to demand that sports clubs invest also in training girls; to encourage educational matches between boys and girls, especially at younger ages; to monitor and encourage long-term participation of girls in sports; to invest heavily in increasing opportunities to practice sports to all women; to encourage women's professional improvement by providing courses for arbitrating, training and management in sports and monitoring the issues they face in these professional situations; to encourage the participation of women in referee teams for all sport modalities; to encourage women to train high performance teams, both for men and women; to acknowledge the efforts made by woman to overcome the hurdles in place in the sports milieu; to request from the media more coverage of different sports and not only soccer and to invest in women's visibility in different functions and spheres. If these possibilities were implemented, they believe that: "It would start to foster equality between men and women." (Former hockey athlete and coach)

## **6 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS**

Aware of the work that still needs to be done, women pointed out the urgent need to transform sports in a more gender-friendly venue, which could mean that the "rhetoric of equality" that is much focused at different levels of the European Community is still far from becoming true. In relation to sports, Portugal has joined in the claim to expand the participation of women in different sport venues and levels, talking about investing in projects that address the role of women in important roles. However, these possibilities are still set in paper and need yet to be put into practice, as the asymmetries are still the same as a decade ago. The study identified that low investments for women in sports, the poor structure, low wages and prizes compared to what is awarded

to men and poor media coverage are still the norm in the unequal treatment of sportswomen compared to sportsmen. Despite the difficulties, women create strategies to expand their function and consequently open venues to foster a longer participation in the sports milieu.

The study also noted that many women are rejecting being victims in a segment that is strongly male-dominated; rather, they are taking on an attitude of resistance and not stepping down from the positions they already hold to pursue their goals. They believe that the hardships they must overcome in the sports milieu are mainly those of their daily life, which they are willing to overcome. When suggesting changes for sports management, these women once again reaffirm their stand and campaign for public policies that address giving women expanded access to sports and providing improved conditions so they can participate in this field for a longer period of time by making investments on professionalization at all levels and spheres of sports. Finally, this study points out that acknowledging the existing inequalities is mandatory to mobilizing actions that will address and provide equal opportunities for both sportsmen and sportswomen.

**Trajetórias de mulheres no esporte em Portugal:  
assimetrias, resistências e possibilidades**

**Resumo:** Fundamentada no aporte teórico dos estudos de gênero, esta pesquisa efetuou-se através da realização de entrevistas com 21 mulheres atletas e ex-atletas atuantes nas funções técnicas e diretivas no esporte de Portugal. Emergiram três unidades de significados cuja análise permite identificar avanços na ampliação da participação das mulheres no campo esportivo, ainda que, para que se mantenha, seja necessário que as mulheres diversifiquem funções e aceitem condições de trabalho diferenciadas daquelas oferecidas aos homens. Rejeitando a posição de vítimas, as entrevistadas transformam as assimetrias em desafios e sugerem ações para incentivar, ampliar e

consolidar a participação feminina em todas as esferas de competência esportiva.

**Palavras-chave:** Mulheres. Esporte. Identidade de gênero. Trabalho feminino.

### **Trayectorias de mujeres en el deporte en Portugal: asimetrías, resistencias y posibilidades**

**Resumen:** Fundamentada en el aporte teórico de los estudios de género, esta investigación se efectivo a través de la realización de entrevistas con 21 mujeres atletas y ex-atletas actuantes en las funciones técnicas y directivas en el deporte de Portugal. Emergieron tres unidades de significados cuya análisis permite identificar un avance en la ampliación de la participación de las mujeres en el campo deportivo, aún que, para que se mantenga, sea necesario que las mujeres diversifiquen funciones y acepten condiciones de trabajo diferenciadas de aquellas ofrecidas a los hombres. Rechazando la posición de víctimas, las entrevistadas transforman las asimetrías en desafíos y sugieren acciones para incentivar, ampliar y consolidar la participación femenina en todas las esferas de competencia deportiva.

**Palabras clave:** Mujeres. Deporte. Identidad de género. Trabajo de mujeres.

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