



## CHAPTER 10

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# From the Carpet to the Executive Committee: Women Leading Women's Gymnastics

*Georgia Cervin, Grégory Quin and Axel Elías Jiménez*

## INTRODUCTION

In 1933, Countess Hedwig Zamoyska of Poland established the first women's committee for the international gymnastics federation: the Fédération Internationale de Gymnastique (FIG).<sup>1</sup> The institution of women's competitions, governed by a committee of women, established a space for women in international gymnastics, both as athletes and competitors. So rare were such spaces, that FIG leaders dreamed of governing all of

<sup>1</sup>Her father in law, Count Adam Zamoysky was President of FIG at this time. Monique Berlioux, "Olympic Encyclopedia: Gymnastics and Archery," April 1985. Retrieved from [www.library.la84.org](http://www.library.la84.org).

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G. Cervin (✉)

The University of Western Australia, Crawley, WA, Australia

G. Quin

University of Lausanne, Lausanne, Switzerland

A. Elías Jiménez

King's College London, London, UK

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245

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women's sports, not just gymnastics.<sup>2</sup> As the century progressed, women's gymnastics diverged into Women's Artistic Gymnastics and Rhythmic Gymnastics, each designed to showcase femininity, and each with their own women's technical committee (WTC). The women-led governance of these women-only events also provided women with a seat at the table on the executive committee of FIG. The chair of each technical committee was automatically granted a position on the executive committee.<sup>3</sup> But for most of the century, this system only guaranteed two women on the executive committee, where the total number of members evolved between eight and ten through recent decades. Moreover, when women as administrators were confined to their own spaces, how much power were they really granted within FIG?

In this chapter, our intention is to explore the shifting role of women within FIG's committees. In order to tell the stories of the women behind these numbers, we present biographical case studies to explore the social, cultural and political backgrounds that enabled the career trajectories of women in FIG throughout the century, and throughout the world. We then discuss these careers in the unique context of the sport of gymnastics, where women's disciplines developed earlier than in many other sports, growing significantly from the 1950s onwards.<sup>4</sup>

Our case studies centre around Egle Abruzzini of Italy, Jackie Klein Fie of the USA, and Naomi Valenzo of Mexico. Each of these women were judges in their respective gymnastics disciplines before becoming internationally accredited and eventually members of FIG technical committees in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. In our previous studies on gymnastics, these figures have emerged as playing key roles in the decision-making of their respective disciplines, Rhythmic Gymnastics and Women's Artistic Gymnastics (WAG), yet little is known about them.<sup>5</sup> Moreover,

<sup>2</sup> Georgia Cervin, "A Balance of Power: Women's Artistic Gymnastics During the Cold War and Its Aftermath," (PhD diss., University of Western Australia, 2017), 17.

<sup>3</sup> Margaret C. Brown, "Gymnastic Reunion in Prague," *The Journal of Health and Physical Education* 10, no. 5 (1939): 270–318.

<sup>4</sup> Georgia Cervin, Claire Nicolas, Sylvain Dufraisie, Anaïs Bohuon, and Grégory Quin, "Gymnastics' Centre of Gravity: The Fédération Internationale de Gymnastique, Its Governance and the Cold War, 1956–1976," *Sport in History* 37, no. 3 (2017): 309–31.

<sup>5</sup> See for instance, Cervin, "A Balance of Power."; Grégory Quin, *Devenir un sport olympique. Jalons pour une histoire comparée des développements de la gymnastique rythmique en France et en Suisse (1961–2011)*, report for l'Académie Nationale Olympique Française, 2014.

competitive gymnastics has often been studied on a national scale, or in terms of separate disciplines (Rhythmic, Women's Artistic, Men's Artistic, et cetera) rather than under the single institution through which it is governed. Our study seeks to compare career trajectories across two of FIG's disciplines (the two earliest, and both still women-only), as well as to offer an international perspective on participation in governance.

We use a variety of methods to piece together each biography. We conducted several life-course interviews to supplement documentation surrounding Egle Abruzzini and Naomi Valenzo, whose careers arose later in this timeline. Interviews with Valenzo were conducted via video call. Jackie Klein Fie is placed somewhere in between these methods: being unavailable for oral history her biography was based on textual sources including her own list of roles on her personal LinkedIn account, which was then sent to her for further detail. Given that Fie created this LinkedIn account and chose to list her accomplishments, work history and other information, we consider this source a modern form of memoir, albeit achievement-based and emotionless.

We interpret these life stories through collective biography, which allows researchers to piece together narratives of the lives of various individuals to identify connections between them.<sup>6</sup> Here we present an intergenerational collective biography. Although our subjects' careers overlapped, and they are sure to have heard of if not known those who came before them, they also represent several generations of leadership in international gymnastics. Doing so allows us to identify commonalities in their experiences as well as to assess how far gymnastics has become a space for women's leadership. It also shows the geographic expansion of women's leadership in gymnastics, moving from white Western European women to European women more broadly, and finally, looking into Latin America. To begin, we survey the gendered history of gymnastics, before exploring literature around women's work and collective biography. We then explore the biographies of five women administrators in FIG, before analysing their stories through a lens of women and work.

<sup>6</sup>Susanne Gannon, Susan Walsh, Michele Byers, and Mythili Rajiva, "Deterritorializing Collective Biography," *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* 27, no. 2 (2014): 181–95.

## WOMEN'S INVOLVEMENT IN THE INTERNATIONAL GOVERNANCE OF GYMNASTICS

Gymnastics is a very complex sport, as its international federation has to deal with eight distinct disciplines, which are all very different, both from a technical point of view and from a gender balance one.<sup>7</sup> Gymnastics of the modern era has its roots in military, medical and pedagogical training in the late eighteenth century.<sup>8</sup> As competition developed, men's gymnastics was contested at the first Olympic Games in 1896 and throughout the early twentieth century the apparatus were refined and finalised. By the 1930s, women were also sometimes allowed to compete, but it was not until 1952 that it became WAG using the same four standard apparatus. It was during this period too that women created their own technical committee to govern over women's gymnastics, meeting for the first time in 1933.<sup>9</sup> However it is not clear when women were first represented on the executive committee. Men's and Women's Artistic Gymnastics both continued to promote performances based on strength and power, and interpretations of "artistry" that are defined by gender. The most obvious example of this difference is in the slow and steady performances required of men in the floor exercise, while women are required to dance to music in the same event. If such differences seem to promote Western ideals of gender, then it is worth remembering the origins of the sport lie in various parts of nineteenth-century Europe (Germany, Czechoslovakia, Sweden), as well as the domination of Europeans in the FIG that would prevail until at least the 1980s.

When the apparatus for Women's Artistic Gymnastics were standardized, it was decided that hand-held apparatus like clubs or ribbon would not be contested. Such events would become Modern Gymnastics, which is now known as Rhythmic Gymnastics. A women-only discipline, it gained

<sup>7</sup> These disciplines are Men's Artistic Gymnastics, Women's Artistic Gymnastics, Rhythmic Gymnastics, Acrobatic Gymnastics, Aerobic Gymnastics, Trampoline, Gymnastics for all, and most recently, Parkour.

<sup>8</sup> Gertrud Pfister, "Cultural Confrontations: German Turnen, Swedish Gymnastics and English Sport—European Diversity in Physical Activities from a Historical Perspective," *Culture, Sport, Society* 6, no. 1 (2003): 61–91.

<sup>9</sup> Monique Berlioux, "Olympic Encyclopedia: Gymnastics and Archery," April, 1985. Retrieved from [www.library.la84.org](http://www.library.la84.org).

popularity in the 1950s and 1960s, and finally entered the Olympic programme in the 1980s, after a specific technical committee was formed inside FIG in 1973.<sup>10</sup> As a sport, Rhythmic Gymnastics encourages more aesthetic and female oriented-stereotypes. Since the 1990s, performances have demanded hyper-flexibility and contortion, dancing, leaping and pirouetting to music and lyrics with hand-held apparatus like ribbons, clubs, rope, ball or hoop. The athletes often wear stage make-up and heavily bejewelled leotards, which may also include short skirts. Thus, we can see that each of these disciplines was created and maintained with gendered ideals, despite the gender composition of those governing the sport.

As the disciplines of gymnastics are clearly gendered, we can turn to the committees governing them to assess their composition, and the extent of influence women could wield within these two spaces created specifically for them: Women's Artistic Gymnastics and Rhythmic Gymnastics. This place of women in FIG is quite remarkable for the time period. In 1933, women in the FIG were given a "room of their own"; control over the development of women's gymnastics. To place this in its context, during the First World War, women were able to participate more fully in the labour force until the return of soldiers and a "masculine economic backlash" prevented this trend from continuing for the most part. Historian, Harold Smith argued that a "marriage bar" delineated women's work at this time: married women did unpaid work at home, and unmarried women were able to continue careers outside the home.<sup>11</sup> But while marital status has undoubtedly been an important factor in the careers of women, scholars have debunked the idea of separate private and public spheres of work. Rather, research has demonstrated the interdependency of these spheres.<sup>12</sup> Certainly, this can be seen in women's place within FIG, beginning with the creation of the first women's committee, which was led by Countess Zamoyska, wife of the FIG president at the time.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Quin, *Devenir un sport olympique*, 52.

<sup>11</sup> Harold Smith, "Sex vs. Class: British Feminists and the Labour Movement, 1919–1929," *Historian* 47, no. 1 (November 1984): 19–37; Audrey Kobayashi, Linda Peake, Hal Benenson, and Katie Pickles (eds.), *Women, Work, and Place* (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 1994), 18.

<sup>12</sup> Marilyn J. Boxer and Jean H. Quataert (eds.), *Connecting Spheres: Women in the Western World 1500 to the Present* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987).

<sup>13</sup> Brown, "Gymnastic Reunion in Prague."

Nonetheless the division of work into domestic versus public presents a hierarchy of value, which is linked to paid work in the public sphere being more highly regarded than unpaid, private or domestic work. Thus a key question in the history of women's work concerns the perceived value of their contributions, and particularly whether women gained status through their work.<sup>14</sup> Deborah Simonton also highlighted the issue of skill: "women were excluded from many established routes to male-defined expertise, which were closely associated with status, prestige and political rights."<sup>15</sup> The issue of skill is particularly important in sports, where athletic success can be perceived as skill in other aspects of work in sports.

### USING COLLECTIVE BIOGRAPHY TO SHOWCASE WOMEN'S WORK IN THE FIG

Our intersectional approach seeks to avoid the use of the "heroic biography," which celebrates the rich, beautiful, famous or notorious, and is certainly among the most common forms of biography.<sup>16</sup> And while political biography is criticised for attributing complex historical developments to the individual rather than giving due weight to the historical context,<sup>17</sup> Lucy Riall insists that exploring the life of a political leader "can tell us a great deal about the creation and exercise of power."<sup>18</sup> We take the view that FIG executive committee members were in fact political leaders in the sporting world, despite their power being muted by the presence of the committee. In exploring generations of political leaders in gymnastics through collective biography, we aim to avoid the pitfalls of single biographies. Instead, we use the lives of individual women in FIG to show how power was established and exerted itself on women in a sport that had provided a space especially for them.

<sup>14</sup> Deborah Simonton, *A History of Women's Work* (London: Routledge, 1998), 8.

<sup>15</sup> Simonton, *A History of Women's Work*, 9.

<sup>16</sup> Charles W. Hayford, "Where's the Omelet? Bad King Deng and the Challenges of Biography and History," *Journal of Asian Studies* 75, no. 1 (2016): 19–30.

<sup>17</sup> Lucy Riall, "The Shallow End of History? The Substance and Future of Political Biography," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 40, no. 3 (2010): 375–97.

<sup>18</sup> Riall, "The Shallow End," 376.

Collective biography has long been an important feature of feminist research.<sup>19</sup> The social sciences have used this method for the extraction of memories from a group with shared experiences.<sup>20</sup> Here, we intend this method instead as a collection of biographies about subjects with a shared experience. A historical application of collective biography does not see all our subjects together in the same room at once, but rather, filing in one after the other through their trails of textual, photographic and oral sources. In our case, doing so with subjects in overlapping time periods, we consider ours what we term an “intergenerational collective biography.” Despite this difference in method demanded by the constraints of time passed, the validity of collective biography as a methodological framework remains. It is only through the collective that we can:

... identify and begin to unpack the discursive threads and familiar cultural storylines through which subjects are constituted and made recognizable to themselves and to others ... The focus shifts from individuals (telling their stories) to processes of subjectification within which subjects come into being, as collective biography draws attention to historically and culturally specific grids of intelligibility such as gender and sexuality.<sup>21</sup>

Therefore, as we explore the lives of various leaders in gymnastics throughout this chapter, we explore their shared experiences despite belonging to different generations, constantly asking how gender has shaped their lives’ work. We begin this journey with Italian Egle Abruzzini, and follow a chronological order, examining Jackie Klein Fie, then Naomi Valenzo’s biography, before offering some collective analysis.

### *Egle Abruzzini, 1969–2008 (Italy)*

Egle Abruzzini was born in 1936 in Brescello. Religion was very important in her family, as her mother’s family relatives were members of the Baptist Church, where Egle’s grandfather was pastor.<sup>22</sup> Nevertheless, Abruzzini

<sup>19</sup> Gannon et al., “Deterritorializing.”

<sup>20</sup> Frigga Haug, “Memory as a Method of Social Science Research: A Detailed Rendering of Memory-Work Research,” 1999. <http://www.friggahaug.inkrit.de/documents/memorywork-researchguidei7.pdf>.

<sup>21</sup> Gannon et al., “Deterritorializing,” 183–84.

<sup>22</sup> Egle Abruzzini, interview with Gregory Quin, April 7, 2013.

chose to join the “Valdese Church,” an evangelical sect linked to the Waldensian Protestants and the Methodists, that in the 1960s was a small but active group in Italy of about 30,000 people. Being part of this sect appeared to be one of the turning points in Abruzzini’s life, influencing her behaviour and structuring her sense of commitment, since the church’s doctrine encourages extreme sobriety, rigour, social engagement and fairness.

Abruzzini discovered the world of sports when she was a teenager, while doing athletics and eventually winning several medals at national selection days. She probably then developed some taste for elite sports and soon, in 1952, she also learnt that an institution—the Istituto Superiore di Educazione Fisica (ISEF)—had been created in Rome to offer higher education in the field of sports, and especially for physical education teachers from both sexes.<sup>23</sup> After finishing her mandatory schooling, she successfully applied to enter the ISEF in 1954. Teaching was one of the most common career paths for middle-class women in Western Europe at this time, which is likely the social class to which Abruzzini belonged. As we shall see, becoming a physical education teacher was not a unique way to for a woman to make a career out of an interest in sports.

During her training in Rome, she met Andreina Gotta-Sacco, teacher at the ISEF and one of the leading figures in the Italian gymnastics sphere, who selected her to join a group of female students, whose task was to study rhythmic gymnastics and eventually propose demonstrations during the Gymnaestrada in 1957 in Zagreb. This discipline was then new in Western Europe, as initial projects also existed in France, at the same period, where Berthe Villancher and some teachers of the “Popard School” in Paris created some contacts with Moscow.<sup>24</sup>

Finally, Abruzzini graduated in 1957, after writing a thesis on respiratory gymnastics. In the same period, she also married Livio Sichirollo, and won her first position as a physical education teacher in Foggia, a city near Bari in the south of Italy. After a few years, she moved again to Urbino to join a new ISEF opened for the district of Pesaro in 1963. She was then contacted by Mario Gotta, the influential Director of the ISEF in Rome, who had noticed

<sup>23</sup> Angela Teja, *Educazione fisica al femminile. Dai primi corsi di Torino di ginnastica educativa per le maestre (1867) alla ginnastica moderna di Andreina Gotta-Sacco (1904–1988)* (Rome: Società Stampa Sportiva, 1995); Renata Freccero, *Storia dell’Educazione Fisica e Sportiva in Italia* (Torino: Levrotto et Bella, 2013).

<sup>24</sup> Quin, *Devenir un sport olympique*.



Egle Abruzzini's competences during her studies. In fact, in Urbino, the rector of the University had the intention to instal a new ISEF, and was also willing to include rhythmic gymnastics in its programme. He found in Abruzzini a very committed expert, who soon served both as instructor for modern rhythmic gymnastics at the ISEF and as physical education teacher in the public schools of the city. In Urbino, she also started to work on a doctoral thesis focused on the pedagogical aspects of modern rhythmic gymnastics in order to be able to access more prestigious positions in the academic field, such as a professorship,<sup>25</sup> eventually graduating in 1971.

It was also in Urbino that she started to collaborate with the Italian Gymnastics Federation, maintaining some contacts with her former teacher Andreina Gotta.<sup>26</sup> In 1969, Abruzzini obtained her international judge qualification from FIG,<sup>27</sup> being among the judges for the next world championships to be organized in Varna, Bulgaria in September. From 1969 onwards, she then attended every world championship as a judge, in Cuba (1971), Holland (1973), Spain (1975) and Switzerland (1977), but also soon as a member of the new FIG technical committee for Rhythmic Gymnastics (RG).<sup>28</sup> During the 1970s, she served as an expert on numerous courses given all over Europe, especially to train new judges for rhythmic gymnastics, while the discipline was also moving quickly from an almost entirely "choreographically-based discipline" to a real sport, with new technical content.<sup>29</sup>

In the meantime, in Italy, Abruzzini continued to promote RG through the organization of dozens of courses each year and also through engagement with local gymnastics clubs. However, she was never willing to become a trainer herself. In fact, she was focused on the promotion of gymnastics, and during the 1970s and 1980s Abruzzini also dedicated much time to gathering ideas on the pedagogical, methodological and technical aspects of curricular physical education and RG.<sup>30</sup> When Andreina

<sup>25</sup> Egle Abruzzini, interview with Gregory Quin, April 7, 2013.

<sup>26</sup> Egle Abruzzini, interview with Gregory Quin, April 7, 2013.

<sup>27</sup> Personal Archives Egle Abruzzini (Urbino), First judge attestation, 1969.

<sup>28</sup> This committee's missions are focused around the technical changes in RG regulations and it took charge of the international team of judges responsible for the evaluation of gymnastics contests, such as the world championships and the Olympic Games.

<sup>29</sup> Personal Archives Egle Abruzzini (Urbino), different versions of the ICP (1975–2008).

<sup>30</sup> Among Abruzzini's writings, we can quote: *Considerazioni storiche e "pedagogiche" sulla funzione della ginnastica moderna*, in: *Quaderni di storia, filosofia e letteratura*, 1, 1973; *Linee*

Gotta-Sacco stepped down from her position within the Italian Gymnastics Federation in 1976, Abruzzini was chosen as her “natural successor” and extended her work, especially by creating new opportunities to improve the highest specialization in RG. Two years later, she also won a national selection—organized under the umbrella of the Ministry of Education—to become a “central government inspector” for physical education. We imagine that her impressive trajectory reflects an important network of relationships with key players in sports government. However, at that stage she was deemed too young to get the position, and was finally appointed in 1982.<sup>31</sup> Trying to avoid those kinds of conflicts of interest was also deeply rooted in Abruzzini’s behaviour. Although this is according to Abruzzini herself, we also see evidence of this in her career: she would quit her “federal” position, because from 1980 onwards she was a member of FIG’s technical committee, and did not believe she was able to be efficient on both sides.

On the international scene, the rise of Egle Abruzzini was fast and would last for more than three decades. She became one of the most influential officials in the history of RG due to her work leading its development. Actually, when Egle Abruzzini accessed the FIG technical committee for RG in 1980 during the Olympic Games in Moscow,<sup>32</sup> the discipline had already been accepted into the Olympic programme for the 1984 Games in Los Angeles.<sup>33</sup> Thus, the discipline which then still was very aesthetically—and choreographically—oriented, was about to do a U-turn in its philosophy to become a real “sport,” under the influence of the International Olympic Committee (IOC). In preparation for its Olympic debut, the discipline changed its name to “Rhythmic Sports Gymnastics” (RSG) in 1981.<sup>34</sup> The IOC also demanded that the length of the competitions should not exceed the length of the former competition of artistic gymnastics. It was in the context of these instructions that Abruzzini would make her mark on the governance of RSG.

*di ginnastica moderna. Tecniche, metodologie e didattica* (Urbino: Argalìa Ed., 1974); *Fondamenti tecnici della ginnastica ritmica educativa* (Rome: FGI Romagraphica-Tipar, 1982).

<sup>31</sup> Egle Abruzzini, interview with Gregory Quin, April 7, 2013.

<sup>32</sup> FIG, *Official Bulletin*, no. 106, p. 97.

<sup>33</sup> IOC, FIG Documents, Olympic programme 1950–1984, Letter from the president of the programme commission to the FIG president, March 13, 1979.

<sup>34</sup> Marisa Aparo et al., *Ginnastica ritmica* (Rome: Piccin, 1999), 234.

Secretary for the committee between 1980 and 1984, then vice-president between 1984 and 1988, and finally president from 1988 to 2008, Abruzzini had the responsibility of rewriting for the purpose of modernization, the International Code of Points (ICP) before every Olympic Games. Her duty, based on discussions she regularly had with Olympic officials was to move forward with what was still considered a “majorette show.”<sup>35</sup> Under her leadership, the ICP moved from an eight to ten-page document to become a huge 150-page booklet, being very precise about all the dimensions of an exercise.<sup>36</sup> These alterations also code changes which impacted the balance of power in RSG, seeing Bulgaria displaced as the dominant nation, in favour of the Soviet Union.<sup>37</sup> Soviet trainers, officials and gymnasts were keen to promote a “sport” again closer to its “ballet” roots, and to use it to promote their countries on the international scene.<sup>38</sup>

If some Bulgarian gymnasts still achieved some great results in the 1990s, the decade would end with one of the most important scandals in the contemporary history of gymnastics. The “Zaragoza European Championship” case in 2000 highlights corruption and the inappropriate behaviour of judges, and put Abruzzini in the middle of the arena.<sup>39</sup> Two major processes then collapsed to create a scandal. On the one hand, RG had, after the 1996 Olympic Games to change its logic, moving away from “10 points is the best note” to a more progressive ranking system, introducing all kinds of specificities around body difficulties and more choreographic appreciations.<sup>40</sup> With this new open-scale judgment, it was also easier to introduce some subjective aspects of the rankings, such as those observed during the competition in Zaragoza or even at the Olympic Games in Sydney, where some journalists expressed doubts about the rankings.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>35</sup> Abruzzini, interview with Gregory Quin, September 26, 2014.

<sup>36</sup> Personal Archives Egle Abruzzini (Urbino), different versions of the ICP (1975–2008).

<sup>37</sup> André Huguenin, *100 ans de la Fédération Internationale de Gymnastique, 1881–1981* (Moutier: FIG, 1981), 80.

<sup>38</sup> Quin, *Devenir un sport olympique*.

<sup>39</sup> Personal Archives Egle Abruzzini (Urbino), Diverse documents about the Zaragoza EC.

<sup>40</sup> FIG, *Official Bulletin*, no. 182, August 2001, 159.

<sup>41</sup> FIG, *Official Bulletin*, no. 183, April 2001, 161.

On the other hand, Rhythmic Gymnastics was also facing a first doping scandal.<sup>42</sup> As it did so, Egle Abruzzini continued her work during the 2000s. She was then focused on trying to protect some artistic dimensions,<sup>43</sup> after having published one of the most demanding codes, in 2000, where more than 25 body difficulties could be included in a 90-second exercise—finally crowning the sportification process that had originated in the 1980s.<sup>44</sup> Besides knowing that Russia and Bulgaria could not remain as the only two countries able to win, Abruzzini also put much energy into the promotion of RG outside Eastern Europe and also outside Europe, even if this was not very effective regarding international rankings. Among many international awards, Abruzzini was distinguished, in 2004, with an Honorary PhD in Humanities from the University of Moscow, also proving how satisfied was Russia with her work to promote and support RG at the highest level. It appears that Abruzzini played a key role beside or beyond the carpet, through her long-lasting technical involvement, as well as for her capacity to maintain some balance in the RG world.

### *Jackie Klein Fie, 1964–2004 (USA)*

She has been called the most influential judge in international gymnastics.<sup>45</sup> USA Gymnastics called her the “First Lady of Gymnastics.”<sup>46</sup> Jackie Fie served as an FIG official at 41 FIG events, including 20 World Championships, 11 World Cups and ten Olympic Games, many Continental and Regional Games, not to mention the tireless administrative work outside these events.<sup>47</sup> American Jackie Fie began her career as a gymnast, Jackie

<sup>42</sup> FIG, *Official Bulletin*, no. 186, April 2002, 121.

<sup>43</sup> Egle Abruzzini, “L’exercice d’ensemble en GRS: la chorégraphie,” in Françoise Napias and Henri Héral (eds.), *Les Cahiers de l’INSEP: GRS le sens d’une évolution* (Paris: INSEP, 1997), 11–20.

<sup>44</sup> About sportification, one can read: Norbert Elias and Éric Dunning, *Quest for Excitement: Sport and Leisure in the Civilizing Process* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986); and more specifically about RG: Grégory Quin, “History of Swiss Feminine Gymnastics Between Competition and Feminization (1950–1990),” *Sport in Society* 19, no. 5 (2016): 653–66.

<sup>45</sup> Jacque Day Archer and Jamie Wirsbinski Santoro, *Rogers Park* (Charleston, NC: Arcadia Publishing, 2007), 103–4.

<sup>46</sup> Bruce Frederick, “First Lady of Gymnastics Retires,” *Technique Magazine*, USA Gymnastics, March 2005, 22–23. See also Day Archer and Santoro, *Rogers Park*.

<sup>47</sup> “Jackie Fie,” *International Gymnastics Hall of Fame*, 2014. <https://www.ighof.com/>.

Klein. A native of Chicago, she grew up on the 6400 block of Bosworth Avenue in Rogers Park, an immigrant suburb, attending the prestigious Saint Ignatius College Prep and The Immaculata High School. There, she began her sporting career in athletics, speed skating and swimming.<sup>48</sup>

She had always practised gymnastics, her mother enrolling her in a class at the Lincoln Turners when she was just four years old.<sup>49</sup> The Turners were a national organization of gymnastics clubs, organized by German immigrants since the mid-nineteenth century. Fie's original coach was Alex Erisoty at Lincoln Turners. Her Olympic coach, Erna Wachtel, was a German immigrant and former American national gymnastics champion. Soon Fie excelled in gymnastics, winning medals both regionally and nationally. By 1956, as a 19-year-old sophomore commuter day student at Northwestern University, Fie qualified to compete for the USA at the Melbourne Olympic Games. The USA was not a major feature in international gymnastics at this time, as competitors or in governance. In fact, Fie would be the one to break this mould when she ascended to FIG, being elected in 1976 at the Montreal Olympic Games. During her studies, the University did not provide gymnastics facilities or competition for women, so Fie continued to practise almost daily at the Lincoln Turners. However, a back injury from a trampoline accident would force her retirement from competition prior to the 1959 Pan-Am Games in Chicago.<sup>50</sup>

In 1959, Fie earned a Bachelor of Science, magna cum laude in Secondary Education with a Major in Physical Education, with Minors in History and English, from Northwestern University, allowing her to continue her path in gymnastics. We can assume from her secondary and tertiary education that Fie belonged to the middle class. It was around this time she began judging national gymnastics competitions. After she graduated this remained a hobby, next to her career as a physical education teacher at Evanston Township High School, adjacent to the Rogers Park Chicago area she grew up in. It was during this period that she had two young sons.<sup>51</sup> She began to work as gymnastics coach for Evanston's Parks and

<sup>48</sup> Day Archer and Santoro, *Rogers Park*; "Jackie Fie," *International Gymnastics Hall of Fame*, 2014. <https://www.ighof.com/>.

<sup>49</sup> Lisa Colonno, "Jackie Fie," *Des Moines Register*. <http://data.desmoinesregister.com/>.

<sup>50</sup> Day Archer and Santoro, *Rogers Park*; Beth Lipoff "Judging Jackie," *Northwestern Magazine*, Summer 2004.

<sup>51</sup> Colonno, "Jackie Fie".

Recreation Departments between 1963 and 1968,<sup>52</sup> but her involvement in gymnastics administration remained.

Fie was quickly shouldered to move into gymnastics administration, with the support of the executive director of the US Gymnastics Federation.<sup>53</sup> In 1964 she started working for the United States Gymnastics Federation (USGF), in both administration and technical leadership. This was to be a lasting position: she served as a member of the executive committee and board of directors for 40 years, from 1964–2004. Fie was Vice-president for Women for a year in 1965–1966, before becoming Assistant Executive Director in 1967 until 1969. She was the first woman to hold administrative office in the organization.<sup>54</sup> During this time she designed the Women’s Committee for the USGF, including its administrative structure and function.<sup>55</sup> For this two year role, she received only a small monthly honorarium. Meanwhile her roles in developing WAG in the USA were entirely voluntary and unpaid.

On the technical side, she reshaped the women’s gymnastics programme and judge education for the newly formed federation. Between 1965 and 1968 she designed and implemented the Junior Olympic Compulsory Programme—a series of set elements and routines that would take gymnasts on a path to international level. She participated in her first FIG intercontinental judges’ course in 1968, and by 1980 was serving as FIG master lecturer delivering this course to others in Moscow. By 1996, she was the director of these FIG Intercontinental courses; one of many varied roles she performed in her duties as FIG WTC President.<sup>56</sup>

Starting in 1964, she ensured the USA would have enough qualified judges to support this programme for gymnasts, also designing a Judges’ Training Programme. This led her to a committee position for judges training that lasted until 1982. The combination of all of these efforts meant Fie was a natural choice for National Technical Director of the Women’s Junior Olympic Age Group Programme for US Gymnastics from 1965–1980.<sup>57</sup>

<sup>52</sup> Bruce Frederick, “First Lady of Gymnastics Retires,” *Technique Magazine*, USA Gymnastics, March 2005, 22–23.

<sup>53</sup> Lipoff, “Judging Jackie.”

<sup>54</sup> Jackie Fie, *LinkedIn*, 2018.

<sup>55</sup> Fie, *LinkedIn*, 2018.

<sup>56</sup> Fie, *LinkedIn*, 2018.

<sup>57</sup> Fie, *LinkedIn*, 2018.

Upon her retirement, former USGF director Frank Bare remarked, “She virtually developed the girls sport in the 1960s and 1970s in the United States.”<sup>58</sup>

At this point, Fie’s personal life encouraged her work. In 1971, she married Larry Fie and moved to his hometown in Iowa. Larry worked for American Athletic Inc., the Jefferson company that made gymnastics and other athletic equipment. A news article looking back on her career noted that this move meant “she communicated with the rest of the world from her home office and often travelled 120 days a year.”<sup>59</sup> Fie lived and breathed gymnastics for most of her life.

At an international level, Fie was a technical official, or judge, for FIG from 1968 onwards. She was the USGF delegate to the FIG congress in 1968–1976, 1980, 1982 and 1987.<sup>60</sup> By 1976 she was elected to the WTC—the judges who literally wrote the rule book for WAG, instructing and supervising judging all over the world.<sup>61</sup> Fie learned German of necessity, since all FIG WTC meetings and minutes were carried out in German, the native language of the WTC President Ellen Berger from 1976 through 1992.<sup>62</sup> Although the FIG’s two official languages were French and English, in reality, the technical committee discussions for Men and Women took place in German. As part of the FIG WTC, Fie was co-author of FIG’s Code of Points for the 1980, 1985, 1989 and 1993 editions. By 1997 she was the main author of the Code of Points, repeating the feat again in 2001.<sup>63</sup> Another former USGF director recalled of her work during this time: “Jackie has been responsible for writing the rules that end up awarding Olympic medals.”<sup>64</sup>

It was the responsibility of the FIG Member National Federation to support their elected official to the FIG. That is, the USGF was to support Fie in her work as a member of the FIG WTC. After four years (1976–1980) being a member of the FIG WTC, as well as chairing several USGF committees, Fie began to receive a modest honorarium for her FIG work.

<sup>58</sup> Lipoff, “Judging Jackie.”

<sup>59</sup> Colonno, “Jackie Fie.”

<sup>60</sup> Fie, *LinkedIn*, 2018.

<sup>61</sup> Colonno, “Jackie Fie.”

<sup>62</sup> Jackie Fie, correspondence with Georgia Cervin, April 22, 2019.

<sup>63</sup> Frederick, “First Lady of Gymnastics Retires.”

<sup>64</sup> Lipoff, “Judging Jackie.”

However, this nominal payment was far from commensurate with what Fie might receive for a teaching position at a university or high school, where one would additionally receive employee benefits. It was Fie's passion for gymnastics that drove her.

For eight years she served as vice-president of the FIG WTC from 1984–1992. In 1992 she became the first president in FIG's 110-year history from outside Europe.<sup>65</sup> As president of the WTC, she also won an automatic seat on the executive committee of FIG, which she held for 12 years.<sup>66</sup> At the 1994 FIG Congress, the General Assembly of national federations, to the dismay of the Technical Committees, abandoned the compulsory routines that had always been a part of the Olympic competition.<sup>67</sup> After 2000, the FIG EC began to force dramatic changes to artistic gymnastics scoring, as the sport came under criticism for questionable judging practices. Upon her retirement from the Women's Technical Committee, she was named Honorary Vice-President of FIG—the first American woman to hold the title.<sup>68</sup> The Athens Olympics in 2004 was her last as a technical delegate, before she retired in earnest.<sup>69</sup>

Additionally, Fie is remembered for her work on improving honesty in international judging circles. When she first entered FIG, the organization was dominated by Europeans, and the judges were alleged to fix scores between themselves. This problem was particularly rife among Eastern bloc officials, of whom they were many. An American administrator had famously complained to the media in 1976 that this situation left Western countries with limited ability to cut deals.<sup>70</sup> While Fie's nationality might not have helped her achieve FIG leadership, her work certainly did. She brought her experience re-organizing American gymnastics to FIG, where she focused on judge education and implemented a new computerized system that evaluated the scoring patterns of judges and decreased collusion and bias.

<sup>65</sup> *USA Gymnastics Magazine* 5, no. 2, September/October 1992, 5.

<sup>66</sup> Fie, *LinkedIn*, 2018.

<sup>67</sup> Cervin, *A Balance of Power*.

<sup>68</sup> "Jackie Fie," *International Gymnastics Hall of Fame*, 2014. <https://www.ighof.com/>.

<sup>69</sup> Lipoff, "Judging Jackie."

<sup>70</sup> Georgia Cervin, "Gymnasts Are Not Merely Circus Phenomena: Influences on the Development of Women's Artistic Gymnastics During the 1970s," *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 32, no. 16 (2016): 1940.



Fie's story is fitting in this period of gymnastics' history. Whereas earlier officials in gymnastics had been upper class or aristocratic Europeans, as a middle-class American, Fie formed a bridge between those before her and those who would come later. When she entered gymnastics, it was a European sport: created there, practised in the West mainly by immigrants, and controlled from its centre in Europe, run by a committee of Europeans. As Fie worked tirelessly to develop WAG in the USA, her roles in the FIG coincided with the US ascension up the world rankings. Unlike many women in sports administration, Fie was married with children. Rather than a constraint however, her personal life only propelled her career, living in a family devoted to gymnastics. She explained to us: "I was fortunate to be married to a wonderful man of the old school, who allowed me to pursue my devotion and passion for my sport."<sup>71</sup> However, she faced the dual career outlook of many women administrators. She was a teacher before she became an administrator, and her work as a leader in gymnastics was remunerated only in honorariums from the national gymnastics federation for her voluntary and time-consuming international positions. With a career characterized by honesty, fairness and diplomacy, Fie's work still emphasized the traditional roles of women.

#### *Naomi Valenzo, 1996–Present (Mexico)*

Naomi Valenzo has been a member of the FIG Executive Committee since 2015. She was vice-president of the WTC of FIG for Women's Artistic Gymnastics (WAG) from 2013 until 2016. Unsurprisingly in the notoriously euro-centric FIG, only one other Latin American woman had served on the WTC. Cuba's association with the former Soviet countries, enabled Teresa Oliva to be elected to this position in 1988, which she retained until 1996 in an organization known for former Eastern bloc dominance. Valenzo considered Oliva to have laid the path for her, as another Latin American woman, to join the ranks of the FIG leadership. Valenzo left her FIG roles for her next positions: she is currently the President of the Pan-American Gymnastics Union (PAGU), and Vice-president of the Mexican Gymnastics Federation (FMG, Federación Mexicana de Gimnasia).<sup>72</sup>

<sup>71</sup> Jackie Fie, correspondence with Georgia Cervin, April 22, 2019.

<sup>72</sup> FIG, *FIG Authorities' Biographies*. <https://administration.fig-gymnastics.com/bios/17738.pdf>, accessed April 5, 2018.

Born to two teachers from economics and social work backgrounds, Valenzo grew up in a middle-class family. Nevertheless, she did not come from a “sporty” family. Her father sometimes played basketball, but never pursued a career in the sport. Naomi began her gymnastics career while studying for her undergraduate degree in business management at Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México – National Autonomous University of Mexico. She claimed that her main goal was to practise karate, but by chance, she enrolled in gymnastic classes because they were held at the same venue. Up to today, Valenzo has not taken a public position concerning representative democracy in Mexico.

She became part of FMG after obtaining one of the best scores in the judging course of the 1996–2000 Olympic cycle. Valenzo’s arrival at the FMG coincided with a period of restructuring of the organization. In the years that followed, her outstanding results as a judge saw her become increasingly involved with the administration of international gymnastics. In retrospect, Valenzo said that she became part of the FMG and PAGU because of her interest in judging, the technical side of the sport, but she gradually became involved in management. According to Valenzo, 1999 was her breakout year in sports management, when she was included in the technical committee of PAGU.

Valenzo has claimed in two interviews that her development in organized gymnastics was two-fold: she became part of FIG from the technical side, as a judge, while she took part in PAGU from the administrative side.<sup>73</sup> When asked about the challenges this presented, Valenzo argued that this dual perspective helped her take better informed decisions.

During her first years as the technical director of the FMG, and PAGU, Valenzo was involved mostly in the development of WAG. But this changed in 2001, when she was elected vice-president of the FMG. Her role as vice-president increased her range of action from WAG to be a decision-maker for all the modalities within the FMG. When asked about her role as vice-president of the FMG, Valenzo commented that she ran for vice-president because she felt that “people were not ready or would not give the power to a woman.”<sup>74</sup> In a sport in which the women’s disciplines have often

<sup>73</sup> Naomi Valenzo, interview with Axel Elías, June 15, 2012 and May 7, 2018.

<sup>74</sup> Naomi Valenzo, online interview with Axel Elías, May 7, 2018. According to the Women in Gymnastics commission, only 32% of the national federations are led by women, while 44% are vice-presidents. Valenzo is representative of this last sample. FIG women in gymnastics commission, *Survey Report of Gender Equality in Gymnastics*, 2017, p. 28.

attracted greater popularity than the men's versions; a sport known for its promotion of women in sports, this feeling is striking. While the woman athlete may be the star of gymnastics, it appears that the professional sports administrator is disadvantaged by gender. Valenzo's comment suggests that even though she felt that she was qualified, the sporting world would not have seriously considered a woman as the head of the sport. Valenzo did not specify if this observation was about the role of women in sports organizations around the world or just in Mexico, but she drew the example saying that until now only one woman, Teresa Ramírez, has presided over the FMG. Compared to other Mexican sports federations, it is interesting to observe that only four out of 74 are presided over by women (5.5%).<sup>75</sup> This shows that the CEO figures in sports federations in Mexico are gendered.

At a continental level, women have presided over PAGU since 1999. Vicelia Florenzano (Brazil) and Zobeira Hernández (Venezuela) were each president for eight years, respectively.<sup>76</sup> Continental federations were FIG initiatives of the 1980s to promote participation in gymnastics from outside Europe.<sup>77</sup> Valenzo commented that she was the third female president of PAGU and considered that the presence of three women was more a matter of chance than because of actual gender policies taking place. In contrast, when she commented on the composition of FIG, Valenzo implicitly questioned the gender gap by noting that only one of four vice-presidents was a woman, while all the executive committee was male and the continental representatives of the sport had very reduced female participation.

Valenzo attributed her ability to rise so high in international gymnastics administration to her hard work. But did she have to work harder than others? When saying, "you have to do more, to be equally considered,"<sup>78</sup> Valenzo showed how despite women being displaced, nationality was also an element that shaped the way she navigated the world of sports. This can

<sup>75</sup>According to the list provided by CODEME (Confederación Deportiva Mexicana – Mexican Confederation of Sports), only four women preside over sport federations: Oralia Margarita Vázquez Coutiño—Aikido; Maria Eugenia Rivera Lara—Sports for the deaf; María del Carmen García Orozco—Hockey, and Ana Claudia Collado García—Autochthonous and traditional games and sports. CODEME, Confederación Deportiva Mexicana. <http://www.com.org.mx/federaciones/>, accessed March 18, 2019.

<sup>76</sup>It is interesting to notice that only PAGU has had women as presidents of continental gymnastics unions and federations. FIG, Continental Unions. [http://www.fig-gymnastics.com/site/about/federation/brief/continental\\_unions](http://www.fig-gymnastics.com/site/about/federation/brief/continental_unions), accessed April 3, 2018.

<sup>77</sup>Cervin, *A Balance of Power*.

<sup>78</sup>Naomi Valenzo, online interview with Axel Elías, May 7, 2018.

be further understood when Valenzo claimed to have spent time trying to “erase all the stereotypes” associated with being from Latin America, such as unpunctuality, for instance.<sup>79</sup>

Looking back at her own trajectory, Valenzo claimed that she had not faced obstacles to obtain her roles managing sports at different levels. Nonetheless, Valenzo considered that she had to create a name for herself given the lack of Mexican representatives in the international gymnastics world. This is relevant because besides gender, it is also important to think about nationality, phenotypical differences and even class when thinking about how women engage with organized sports and its management. In other words, her experience has been intersectional.

Currently, FIG and PAGU have begun to speak more often about gender equality, but it is not regularly discussed.<sup>80</sup> Valenzo observed that Pan-Am sports has taken gender quotas into their structure, and that the IOC has set an example rather than having “exercised pressure,” but commented that there were not policies that guaranteed gender equality.<sup>81</sup> Valenzo considered that the move to allow the opposite gender to judge each gymnastics discipline has helped, but that equality “had not been reached yet.” She claimed to have never felt discriminated against as a woman, taking the view that part of feeling discriminated against was internalizing those beliefs and restricting oneself. Valenzo’s comment highlighted her own individual actions in her career development, instead of assuming structural gender discrimination. In that sense, we can see that she might adhere to a type of liberal feminism.<sup>82</sup> Her “sex-blindness” is relevant concerning how she explained her trajectory and what that meant for her.<sup>83</sup> In interviews she has placed more emphasis on aspects representing the Mexican nation, rather than gender, yet she still engages with debates on the latter.

<sup>79</sup>Valenzo, online interview.

<sup>80</sup>FIG currently has a Women in Gymnastics Commission that is led by Slava Corn. Their 2017 report shows that 58% of the senior international athletes are women; gymnastics is one of few sports that has more female than male participation in the Olympics. FIG women in gymnastics commission, *Survey Report of Gender Equality in Gymnastics*, 2017.

<sup>81</sup>Valenzo, interview.

<sup>82</sup>Susan Wendell, “A (Qualified) Defense of Liberal Feminism,” *Hypatia* 2, no. 2 (1987): 65–93.

<sup>83</sup>For a debate on the definition of individual forms of feminism, see: Loretta Kensinger, “(In)Quest of Liberal Feminism,” *Hypatia* 12, no. 4 (1997): 178–97.

Valenzo's testimony shows empowerment and desire to succeed, while also giving signs of gender discrimination. For instance, talking about the role of women in the decision-making process, she said: "... it is not the same if something is proposed by a man than if something is proposed by a woman ... they do not pay as much attention to you and even less when coming from a country without [a] gymnastics tradition."<sup>84</sup> In addition, Valenzo described her career "like going uphill," but she considered that by being persistent it was possible to get things done. This ambivalence is interesting to observe in Valenzo's and many other gymnastics careers.

One of the reasons Valenzo has been able to enjoy such an illustrious career is that she does not have family commitments preventing her from devoting herself to gymnastics. Conversely though, much of this work has been traditionally demanded of women: selfless investment of time, energy, emotion and labour for the service of others. Her work for FIG and PAGU—perhaps the most prestigious roles—were both unpaid, voluntary positions. Her only paid work in gymnastics is her role as vice-president of the FMG. Valenzo has shown that women can be successful sports administrators regardless of nationality or gender. But in a sport known for its space for women, her career also echoes the familiar story of women in the workforce: overlooked for higher positions, while much of her work has been unpaid labour.

### COLLECTIVE ANALYSIS

The sporting context offers important insight into the question of skill. Although the skills of an administrator are not necessarily related to the skill of an athlete, experience and excellence in the sport in question can provide the perception of skill that allows women to pursue administrative careers within their sports. Sporting careers present a duality: while sports has been considered the domain of men, the link between athletic performance and career can be seen to provide pathways for women.

In this context, the history of women in sports leadership presents a unique opportunity. Their skilled work was performed outside the house, in public. Women in gymnastics administration were able to attain their skill first as athletes, before leveraging this experience towards skill in administration of the sport. Interestingly, it was general athletic skills that started

<sup>84</sup>Valenzo, interview.

these women's careers, rather than gymnastics success. Both Abruzzini and Valenzo were talented and accomplished athletes, but neither competed in gymnastics at an international level. In fact, both were only introduced to the sport during their time at university. But we also note that all three of these women went to university, which indicates that they came from relatively wealthy backgrounds. They were all also fluent in at least two languages. We could equally note that Abruzzini and Fie both leant on their formal training in physical education to attain their positions, but by Valenzo's time the commercialization of sports meant that training in business skills was highly valued. It was only Jackie Klein Fie who had a lifelong affiliation to gymnastics, first as a gymnast, then through her work and family.

All three women were qualified as "Brevet" international judges, which support their careers. Indeed, throughout the twentieth century, it was a requirement that technical representatives be judges. We can see that representation on national committees was a key entry point for these women's work in governance (Table 10.1). Abruzzini and Fie relied on developing the technical side of the sport; moving into the WAG and RSG technical

**Table 10.1** Career trajectories of Abruzzini, Fie, and Valenzo

	<i>National roles</i>	<i>Continental roles</i>	<i>International roles</i>
Egle Abruzzini	1976 Technical director	No	1980 Secretary RTC 1984 Vice-president RTC 1988–2008 President RTC 1998–2008 Member, EC
Jackie Fie	1964–2004 EC member	No	1976 Member, WTC 1984 Vice-president, WTC 1992–2004 President, WTC 1992–2004 Member, EC
Naomi Valenzo	1996 Member, FMG 1997 Technical director, FMG 2001 Vice-president, FMG	1999 Member, WTC PAGU 2016–present President, PAGU	2013–2016 Vice-president, WTC 2015–present Member, EC

committees at FIG, and serving as president of those committees afforded them positions on FIG's executive committee. Fie and Abruzzini's technical work in the sport was regarded as voluntary, and unpaid. Valenzo diverged from her technical role into more of an administrative and management path across all gymnastics disciplines. Although she remained in technical leadership at an international level, she was able to combine this with professional activities in gymnastics management. This route took her from national governance to continental governance, which also afforded her involvement on the FIG executive committee.

Another consideration is the role of family in enabling (or creating obstacles) to women's participation in sporting administration. For Fie, her marriage complemented her passion for gymnastics. Her husband and children were involved in the sport, so her commitment to gymnastics was as much a part of her home life as it was her professional life. In this sense, her family was a key area of support and encouragement for her career. By contrast, Valenzo attributed the success of her career in gymnastics administration to the absence of a husband and children, who might demand that she take on domestic duties at the expense of her gymnastic work. Abruzzini's husband, Sichirollo, was a scholar of such esteem that his commitment to philosophy surely equalled her own commitment to gymnastics. The devotion to career development that must have been part of Sichirollo's worldview appears to have fostered a supportive environment for Abruzzini's gymnastic ambitions. It seems likely that Sichirollo's role at the university probably also helped Abruzzini establish herself in the university town of Urbino, from which she launched her career as a physical educator. But we do not know for certain what Sichirollo's views were in regard to having a working wife, rather than one devoted solely to her home.

All three of these women held roles of power and influence in gymnastics. Yet, despite the professional nature of their work, it was largely unpaid, so they had to rely on other professional positions or on the salary of their husband. Although it is tempting to relate this to the typical way that women's work is valued as unpaid labour, we must also remember that amateurism ruled the day for much of this period. People engaged in elite sports for "pure" purposes, rather than seeking monetary value from it, and in gymnastics, financial gain for athletes was not considered by FIG until the 1990s.<sup>85</sup> Positions on men's gymnastics committees were also unpaid,

<sup>85</sup> Cervin, "A Balance of Power."

but we must reflect that staff working for FIG or their national federation were considered professional and compensated as such. Nonetheless, the amount of time these women spent developing rules for their sports, both domestically and internationally, leads us to consider their work as unpaid labour, even if it was the norm for men as well as women, on sporting committees throughout this period.

Gymnastics biographies show that when involved in an international organization, women leaders are likely to develop similar strategies and paths to their male colleagues, from a successful career on the carpet, to some early involvements at a national level, finally playing some international roles. Interestingly, the biographies of Abruzzini, Fie and Valenzo also illustrate the change in the construction of the technical expertise required, precisely around the decreasing importance of physical education and traditional gymnastics skills towards some more sports-oriented competences. Our examples also show that women gymnastics leaders act mostly in the women's branches of the sport (Rhythmic Gymnastics and Women's Artistic Gymnastics) and as a consequence, they are acting in very technical roles, rather than being directly involved in executive or strategic committees. The exception is Valenzo, but even she had her start by operating in the women's branches, and felt it difficult to be heard and reach top positions, because she was a woman. We hypothesize that this is actually in line with typical trajectories for women in workplaces: women are given responsibility for tasks within women's domains (typically hosting, feeding, caring, and in this case, women's gymnastics), while men are perceived to exhibit leadership behaviours necessary for strategic management. This begs the question of the extent to which gymnastics can really be seen as a beacon of women's leadership in sports. By our assessment, it is such executive and strategic committees that afford decision-making opportunities beyond the limits of gendered disciplines. As women operate within the confines of the WTC or Rhythmic Technical Committee, and only on the executive committee as representatives of those disciplines, they are not truly exercising their full capacities as decision-makers in the wider sport of gymnastics.

Finally, we note, as we did at the outset, that women have been invited to preside over women's disciplines in gymnastics and have had a representative from each of these two disciplines on the executive committee for a long time. Having formed the first international women's committee in 1930, women have been involved in gymnastics governance for much longer than women have had such opportunities in other sports. So, while



we urge that there is more scope for meaningful decision-making roles for women in FIG, we also recognize that gymnastics draws on a longer history of making space for women, which was historically progressive.

## CONCLUSION

Collective biography has the benefit of drawing trends across a group. What we term “intergenerational collective biography” has allowed us to examine these three women’s careers in gymnastics and how opportunities for women’s leadership in the sport have (and have not) changed over time. However, we must also reflect on the limitations of our sources and thus, analysis. In particular, we have been unable to speak to any peers of these three women, who might be able to offer some insight into the particular character, qualities and ambitions that led Abruzzini, Fie and Valenzo to their successful careers. Indeed, we are limited to relying very much on the stories these women have chosen to tell us; the way they have listed their achievements to make sense of their place in the world. To that extent, we must be missing some contextual information, and certainly more personal elements of their biographies. For instance, we have deduced that speaking several languages was a common factor that enabled these women to work internationally, but we do not know if they also shared diplomatic manners that supported this work. We know that these women became involved in, and most likely passionate about, the gymnastics world, but we do not know when or why this involvement led to goals of serving on international technical committees, or if indeed, their goals went further, to sitting on the executive committee. This work is thus a starting point for these discussions. We have been able to identify trends at a superficial level, that already allow us to make some conclusions on the nature of governance in gymnastics, but at the same time, further study, deeper biographical research and more analysis are needed.

While Abruzzini played a key role in developing Rhythmic Gymnastics as a sport, Fie later played more of a “refining” role in rewriting the rules for Women’s Artistic Gymnastics. Valenzo has played the most strategic role, ultimately working across all gymnastics disciplines. All three subjects drew on their formal training to secure their positions, but as the century progressed, business skills were valued over physical education principles. At the same time, we observe in each case that other skills were necessary in order to sustain professional, paid employment. Our three subjects were

able to find such income in related fields, like physical education teaching, and in Valenzo's case, as Vice-president of the FMG. We can also see a pattern of removing the dominance of Europeans throughout this time. Italian Abruzzini won her FIG role first, and later American Fie became the first woman from outside Europe to chair the WTC, which also afforded her a seat on the executive committee. Following this, Valenzo became the second Latin American woman to serve on the WTC, and in 2015, became the first to serve on the executive committee. Thus, in several ways, this analysis enables us to see a progression in the possibilities for women's leadership in gymnastics: each woman opened a door for those behind her to follow. However, we can also observe that these roles have been limited to presiding over gendered sporting disciplines, or representing those disciplines on the FIG executive committee. Thus, where gymnastics was once progressive in including space for women, it now needs to reconsider how it still offers that space on gendered terms.

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