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**Sustaining the Olympic Ideal:
Consequences of the Modern Olympic Games for Women**

by

James G. King III

**FINAL PROJECT SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
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INTRODUCTION

Best is the water, while gold, like fire blazing
 In the night, shines preeminent amid lordly wealth.
 But if you wish to sing
 of athletic games, my heart,
 look no further than the sun
 for another star shining more warmly by day
 through the empty sky,
 Nor let us proclaim a contest greater than Olympia.
 --Pindar Olympian I:1-7¹

The ancient Olympics are arguably the birthplace of sport and the Olympic Games remain the quintessential expression of international sport. The first recorded Olympic victor was a sprinter from Elis, Coroebus, in 776 B.C. and through Pausanias' travel logs and Pindar's Olympic odes, which first appeared in the 16th century, we have learned about the ancient Olympic Games: the events, the venues, its heroes, and rewards. The ancient games were discontinued in 394 A.D. after Theodosius the Great decreed to stop measuring time by Olympiads and the Romans did not have the same religious respect for the games.²

French aristocrat Pierre de Coubertin revived the Olympic Games in 1896 in Athens, the country of their birthplace. Although there had been numerous attempts in the 19th century to re-establish Olympic Games, none succeeded. Only Coubertin's initiative gained international permanence. Coubertin founded the games based on his theory of Olympism. Coubertin defined Olympism as "the religion of energy, the cultivation of intense will through the practice of manly sports, based on proper hygiene and public spiritness surrounded with art and thought."³ Coubertin's ideological and rhetoricized notion of the Olympic Games, which during its conception may well have promoted peace, international understanding, and educational sport, also served discrete class, race,

and gendered ends. As a masculinist, Coubertin's reform movement of physical education in France and his conception of the modern Olympics were based primarily on male interests. For Coubertin, women were better seen as cheerleaders and award presenters, not as competitive athletes, and throughout his years on the International Olympic Committee Coubertin continually sought to restrict women from entering the games, particularly in sports where they were likely to be viewed as spectacle.

Coubertin's theory of Olympism was derived from 19th century internationalism, Muscular Christianity, and Hellenism. The internationalization of sport was part of the larger social and cultural internationalism of the late 19th century. Improvements in train travel and steamships made international travel quicker and less expensive. The founding of a sporting press to report on sporting events and the eagerness of a public to hear about sports aided in the spread of Olympism. Lighter, better made tennis rackets, track shoes, and cycles made performance easier with standardization of rules making international play possible.⁴ International expositions in London in 1851 and Paris in 1867, 1878, and 1889, brought more people together to consider new inventions and ideas.

Muscular Christianity played into Coubertin's Olympism particularly in his conception of the *religio athletae*. Muscular Christianity can be defined as the Christian commitment to health and manliness.⁵ The term probably first appeared in 1857. It was used in a review of Thomas Hughes' *Tom Brown's School Days*, a novel about life at Rugby under headmaster Thomas Arnold. Coubertin read this book in his youth and became enamored with the British system of physical education and competitive sport. Muscular Christianity provided for the development of moral character among an elite

youth through institutionalized programs in physical education and sport. As John Clarke and Charles Critcher explain:

the encouragement of organized sport was simultaneously a means of controlling the characteristically anarchic behavior of public schoolboys and of redirecting the public school ethos towards a model of what would subsequently be defined as “Muscular Christianity.” Thus both the traditional clientele of the aristocracy and the new market of the sons of the bourgeoisie could be retained for the public schools, refurbishing an image tarnished by low morality and dubious academic accomplishment.⁶

Muscular Christianity was also embraced by Dr. William Brookes, founder of the British Wenlock “Olympian Games” of 1890 that influenced Coubertin’s revival of the modern games. As Coubertin stated “since ancient Greece passed away, the Anglo-Saxon race is the only one that fully appreciates the moral influence of physical culture and gives to the branch of education science the attention it deserves.”⁷ Coubertin had become an Anglophile when it came to physical education and sport.

Hellenism also influenced Coubertin’s theory of Olympism. As Richard Mandel states “the prestige of classical culture never dies.”⁸ Coubertin’s Olympism involved an appeal to antiquity. Hellenism was extremely useful in the international cosmopolitan culture of late 19th century Europe where Coubertin was appealing to an aristocratic society trained in the classics. Information about the ancient Olympic Games was transmitted through vivid accounts by cartographers and travelers like Pausanias, descriptions of German 19th century archeological digs which unearthed the altis in Olympia, and Pindar’s Olympian Odes. Literary references also carried the torch throughout the interim centuries between the ancient and the modern Games.

The first allusion to the Olympic Games in western European literature may well have been in the tragedy, “*Pompei the Great, his faire Cornelias Tragedie*” performed in

London in 1595.⁹ Since then numerous references to the Olympic Games have been used in European literature during the 17th-19th centuries including John Milton, who recalled “the Olympian Games” in *Paradise Lost*¹⁰, and Italian poet Metastasio, who wished that he “only had a few Olympians less”¹¹ on his shoulders, Voltaire, who felt he was “transporte aux jeux olympique,” Flaubert who used “Olympique” in his writings,¹² and even Shakespeare who referred to “Olympian wrestling” in *Troilus and Cressida*.¹³ These references collectively transmitted and publicized a particular image of the Games that was obtained across the centuries and helped frame the Zeitgeist that facilitated Coubertin’s own unique athletic ideology.

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

My hypothesis in this paper is that the masculinist ideology of Pierre de Coubertin was rationalized by these literary references which throughout the course of the 17-19th centuries validated the sacredness of the ancient Olympic tradition as a male athletic cult. As a result, throughout the course of the 20th and 21st centuries women have had to fight for their place within one of sports’ most powerful and hallowed institutional expression - the Olympic Games - and remnants of Coubertin’s masculinist proclivities, especially in language, still compromise the equality of women in sport.

I will first identify, analyze, and theorize specific references to the ancient games as they appear in literature. Then I will demonstrate how Coubertin’s idea of Olympism derived from the notions of religion, elitism, chivalry, peace, and eurythmy that were celebrated and perpetuated in these literary references through the ages. I will then offer a discussion of the masculinist nature of the Modern Olympic Games and I will close by

elucidating how efforts to incorporate women into the Olympics have a long and storied history and how the language of sport still denigrates and inferiorizes female athletes.

LITERARY FOUNDATIONS OF THE MODERN OLYMPIC GAMES

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical argument presented in this paper is that the repeated literary references to the ancient Olympic Games throughout the 16th-19th centuries created the setting and the rationale for Coubertin to form his own idiosyncratic Olympic Ideal. Coubertin's theory of Olympism, while on the one hand serving the benevolent goals of physical education and international peace, also served specific class and gender ends. I wish to employ Foucault's historiography, one that rejects a direct, linear evolution of events and seeks a historical archeology that looks at patterns and processes of discursive practices across social strata that produce knowledge. Foucault states his view of history in the following Nietzschean manner:

Effective (*wichtige*) history deals with events in terms of their unique characteristics, their most acute manifestations. An event, consequently, is not a decision, a treaty, a reign, or a battle, but the reversal of a relationship of forces, the usurpation of power, the appropriation of a vocabulary turned against those who had once used it, a feeble domination that poisons itself as it grows lax, the entry of a master "other." The forces operating in history are not controlled by destiny or regulative mechanism, but respond to haphazard conflicts. They do not manifest the successive forms of a primordial intention and their attraction is not that of a conclusion, for they always appear through the singular randomness of events.¹⁴

In looking at the literary references that contributed to the survival of the Olympic Games as an idea, I will be adding to the complex discursive practices which form the historical account that constitutes the Olympics, particularly as the Olympics

developed during years between the abolition of the ancient games and Coubertin's conception of the Modern Olympics. Specifically, I will be looking at the individual discourses and shifting meanings that form an archeology of knowledge that not only allows us "to attain a plurality of histories juxtaposed and independent of one another" but also permits us "to determine what form of relation may be legitimately described between...different series of things."¹⁵ It is the knowledge produced by the individual literary references linked inextricably to operations of power in 19th century Europe that led to the construction of Coubertin's theory of Olympism.

My exploration of the literary references to the Olympic Games is grounded in Foucault's archeology of knowledge. This allows me to assign these historical references to the following philosophical elements of Olympism: religion, elitism, knighthood, peace, and *arete*.

I. Religious Foundations of Olympism

The primary foundation of Olympism is religious. Honoring the gods through supreme effort in sport was essential to the ancient Games, a practice honored and reiterated in literary references. The sanctity of the ancient Olympic Games is part of its appeal. Literary references alluding to the ancient games as a sacred institution kept the proverbial Olympic flame burning. Robert Browning wrote:

Not without much Olympian Glory, shapes
Of God and goddess in their gay escapes
From the severe serene: or haply paced
The antique ways, god-counselled, nymph-embraced
Some early human kingly patronage.¹⁶

The Olympic Games are also referred to in literary verse as installed by divine act.

English poet Nicholas Wallington writes in his homage to Robert Dover, Founder of the Cotswold games:

Th' Olympicks first invented by great Jove;
 When with the Titans, combating hee strove
 For victory and got it, Or by Hercules
 When he had vanquish't Auges king of Elie.¹⁷

Given the religious significance of the ancient games, the Olympics offered the ultimate reward of divine power and enlightenment. As Samuel Coleridge in his 1815 translation of Pindar's 2nd Olympic Ode popularized:

Ye harp-controuling hymns! (or) ye hymns the sovereigns of harps!
 What God? What Hero?
 What Man shall we celebrate?
 Truly pisa indeed is of Jove,
 But the Olympiad (or the Olympic games) did Hercules establish,
 The first-fruits of the spoils of war.
 But Theron for the four-horsed car,
 That bore victory to him,
 It behoves us now to voice aloud:
 The Just, the Hospitable,
 The Bulwark of Agrigentum,
 Of renowned fathers
 The flower, even him
 Who preserves his native city erect and safe.¹⁸

British poet Lewis Morris specifically talks more about the divine knowledge gained by

Olympic victory:

I, who have striven, and prize more my crown
 And blood-stained triumphs of successful war
 The laurel of Olympia-a new height
 Of knowledge; a new virtue unattained,
 And yet attainable; a sacrifice,
 A brotherhood; a self surrender, winged
 To higher Heaven than sensual Gods'
 To whom the ignorant kneel.¹⁹

II. Appeal to the Elite Athlete: The Aristocratic Flare of the Ancient Olympics

The ancient Olympics provided the ultimate stage for elite athletes. Those willing to push themselves to the highest level achieved an athletic elitism that also appealed to those interested in reclaiming the games. Literary references comparing fruits of victory in war to victory in the Olympic Games provided both masculinist and aristocratic appeal. Moses Hadas' translation of Euripedes talks about the honor and elitism of the Olympic athlete and Hellenism, both of which were essential to the foundation of Olympism.

of the myriad afflictions that beset Helas
 None is worse than the breed of athletes.
 Never, first of all, do they understand the good life,
 Nor could they. How can a man enslaved to his jaws,
 Subject to his belly, increase his patrimony?
 Nor to abide poverty, to row in fortune's stream
 Are they able; they have not learned the fair art
 Of confronting the insoluble. Shining in youth
 They stride about like statues in the square.
 But comes astringent age, they shrink in rags.
 Blameworthy is the custom of the Hellenes
 Who for such men make great concourses
 To honor idle sports-for feasting's sake.
 What nimble wrestler, fleet runner, sinewy
 Discus thrower, agile boxer, has benefited his city
 By his firsts? Fight our enemy discus in hand?
 In mellay of shields box the foe from the fatherland?
 Confronted with steel, such silliness none remembers.
 'Tis the wise and the good we should crown with bay,
 Who best guide the state, the prudent and the just,
 Whoso by discourse averts evil actions,
 banishes strife and contention. Prowess of such sort
 is to all the city a boon, to all Hellenes.²⁰

Translations of ancient texts by Euripedies and Pindar popularized conceptions of the ancient Olympics and validated masculinist ways of thinking about Olympic sport.

References to ancient Olympians with statuesque, godlike chiseled bodies also reinforced

masculinist notion of sport. Images of honor in battle spring forth as commanders motivate their troops through an appeal to Olympic glory and honor. In *Henry VI*, William Shakespeare talks about the call to battle as well as honor and victory:

Yet let us all together to our troops,
And give them leave to fly that will not stay,
And call them pillars that will stand to us;
And, if we thrive promise them such rewards
As victors wear at the Olympian games.
This may plant courage in their quailing breasts;
For yet is hope of life and victory.
Forslow no longer; make we hence amain.²¹

Olympic images resonate in Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida* when forces are backed into a corner, "When that a ring of Greeks have thee hemmed in, Like an Olympian wrestling."²² These are vivid images of battle which hold the promise of rewards for gallant fighting and mastering the competition.

The fruits of Olympic victory are wreaths, specifically at Olympia the olive wreath, which was traditionally bestowed upon the Olympic victor. Numerous literary references recall the ancient games symbolically awarding effort. British poet William Denny mentions the symbolic olive garland as the symbol of victory, "Where who so conquered, gain'd besides renown... An Olive Garland as his merits Crowne."²³

Mentions of the laurels of victory are numerous elsewhere in literature. Pope in his "First Book of Statius" draws upon a laurelled elite:

The courtly train, the strangers, and the rest,
Crown'd with chast laurel, and the garlands dress'd,
while the rich gums the fuming alters blaze,
Salute the god in numerous hymns of praise²⁴

Alexander Pope saw the masses without the olive victory garlands as outside the sanctity of the Altis, the sacred Olympic temple.

And 'twere a sin to rob them of their mite.
 Yet ne'er one sprig of laurel grac'd these ribalds,
 From slashing *Bentley* down to piddling *Tibbalds*.²⁵

Percy Shelley mentions the temptations facing the laurelled hero:

Pale Loyalty, his guilt steeled brow,
 With wreaths of glory laurel crowned:
 The hell-hounds, Murder, Want and Woe,
 For ever hungering flocked around;
 From Spain had Satan sought their food,
 'Twas human woe and human blood!²⁶

The reality of the ancient Olympic Games was that great monetary and other significant benefits, including freedom from taxes, permanent employment, and semi-divine status, would meet the ancient Olympian champion as he reached his homeland. Part of the appeal of the Olympics was the perception of its anti-materialism: competition as a reward in itself. The portrait of the noble, amateur male Olympic hero is painted by Horace Smith, a British poet and friend of Percy Shelley:

Men fight in these degenerate days,
 For crowns of gold, not laurel fillets;
 And bards who borrow fire from brays,
 Must have them in the grate of billets.²⁷

Men competing in the ancient Olympics for intrinsic reward formed a chivalrous, elite fraternity of athletes. The Olympics also represented a break in man's daily struggles to compete in honorable international competition.

III. Knighthood

Chivalry echoed the masculinist traditions of the ancient games. The vision of the invincible Olympic male hero is referenced throughout literature. As Homer wrote in the *Iliad*, "the Olympian is a difficult foe to oppose."²⁸ Homer also relates the divine power and glory embodied by the Olympian,

Father Jove, if I ever did you service in word or deed among the immortals,
Hear my prayer, and do honour to my son, whose life is to be cut short so early.
King Agamemnon has dishonoured him by taking his prize and keeping her.
Honour him then yourself, Olympian lord of counsel, and grant victory to the
Trojans, till the Achaeans give my son his due and load him with riches in
requit. ²⁹

With calls to divine glory, masculine references to English knights fighting for honor, chivalry, and divine victory are ignited. As Chaucer mentions in *A Knights Tale*:

And when this worthy duke had all this done,
He gathered host and home he rode anon,
With laurel crowned again as conqueror;
Upon his brows he wore, of laurel green,
A garland, fresh and pleasing to be seen.
Upon his wrist he bore, for his delight,
An eagle tame, as any lily white. ³⁰

British poet Robert Griffin, referring to Robert Dover, founder of the Cotsworth games, argues that Olympic athletes are similar to the chivalrous knights of the round table of King Arthur.

Nere was the Famous Isle honor'd before,
With such brave games, since that brave heroe dy'd
The worlds chiefe worthy; and stout Brittons pryd,
Arthur, with his rotund of Knights. ³¹

The Olympic competitions of Robert Dover's Cotsworth Olympics of the 1600s and Dr. William Penny Brooke, founder of the Wenlock Olympic Games of 1880s, provide a glimpse of the bridge to the modern Olympics because they too appealed to the Hellenic traditions of the ancient Games. In homage to Robert Dover, English poet Michael Drayton writes in 1636 about Dover's Cotsworth Olympics:

Dover, to doe thee Right, who will not strive,
That dost in these dull iron Times revive
The golden ages glories; which poore Wee
Had not so much as dream't on but for Thee?
As those brave Grecians in their happy dayes,
On Mount Olympos to their Hercules

Ordain'd their games Olympick, and so nam'd
 Of that great Mountaine; for those pastimes fam'd:
 Where then their able Youth, Leapt, Wrestled, Ran,
 Threw the arm'd dart; and honor'd was the man
 That was the victor.³²

And William Denny further connects Dover's Cotsworth Games to the spirit of the ancient Games:

Time long sleep, is now awak'd by thee
 Fam'd Dover, who began't the pedigree
 Of Cotswold-sports, where each Olympick game,
 Is paralleld and draws, fresh breath from Fame.³³

The Olympics represented a break from the daily calendar not only to celebrate honorable competition among elite athletes, but also to serve as a marker of a specific passage in time.

IV. Peace

The ancient Olympic Games marked a pan-Hellenic truce: city-states suspended their daily strifes to compete in the chivalrous act of athletic competition. An important aspect of the truce was observing the rhythm of the four-year circadian cycle featured in the ancient games. Literature is full of references to the measurement of time in terms of the four-year Olympiad cycle. English poet Lord George Gordon Byron asks "But when did Pallas teach, that one retreat/Retrieved three long Olympiads of Defeat?"³⁴ while British poet Charles Cotton questions "Have I lov'd my Fair so long/Six Olympiads at least."³⁵ Continuous references to the four year Olympic cycle provide an appeal to the antiquity of the modern games as well as a longing for peace during the celebration of the games.

The olive branch served not only as an anti-material symbol of victory, but it also embodied a fundamental belief in the Olympics as a peace movement. In 1596, English poet laureate Edmund Spenser relates:

Forth came that auncient Lord and aged Queene,
 Arayd in antique robes downe to the ground,
 And sad habiliments right well beseene;
 A noble crew about them waited round
 Of sage and sober Peres, all grauely gownd;
 Whom farre before did march a goodly band
 Of tall young men, all habile armes to sownd,
 But now they laurell braunches bore in hand;
 Glad signe of victorie and peace in all their land.³⁶

Sport and particularly Olympic sport also provides ontological possibilities of war and peace. William Basse, an English poet and disciple of Edmund Spenser, in 1636 was talking about the Dover Olympic games explores the peaceful origins of sport:

For Songs as sweet, as hallowes deepe,
 Deserves the sport, whose harmlesse ends
 Are to helpe Nature, Life to keep,
 And second Love, in joining friends,
 that neither breakes the losers sleepe,
 Nor winner home, Triumphing sends,
 Where none, a little gold so spent,
 Nor Time more precious needs repent.³⁷

While Percy Shelley reveals the darker side of the war in the symbolic laurelled athlete:

Pale Loyalty, his guilt steeled brow,
 With wreaths of glory laurel crowned:
 The hell-hounds, Murder, Want and Woe,
 For ever hungering flocked around;
 From Spain had Satan sought their food,
 Twas human woe and human blood!³⁸

Literary references have added to the bridge between present and past Olympics through the pursuit of the Hellenic traditions of noble competition, good will and peace. In the same publication as Basse, English poet Ben Johnson purported Robert Dover's

Olympic Cotswold Games of 1612 as a search for peace and unity: “How they advance, true Love, and neighborhood,/And doth both Church, and Common-wealth.”³⁹

V. *Arcte*

The rhythmic circadian celebration of the Olympic Games provides a unique and noble opportunity for nations to showcase their finest athletes in pursuit of ultimate glory. The connection of mind, body, and spirit through athletic competition is an essential element of Olympism. The concept of *arete* is defined as the delicate life balance of the pursuit of athletic and moral perfection coupled with artistic expression and harmony of the soul.⁴⁰ Ancient Greeks striving to achieve *arete* provided an aristocratic appeal paramount in energizing the modern Olympic Games. Imbedded in the concept of *arete* is the quest for knowledge. The ancient Olympic Games provided the ultimate test for athletes to seek (knowledge) together and attain greater self-knowledge in striving for athletic and moral perfection.⁴¹

Arete also provided for the integration of arts and athletic competition in the ancient Olympic Games. By using mental and artistic skills in addition to physical ones, the Olympic athlete would represent the Hellenic model of chivalry, nobility, and honor. In 1880 Vernon Lee, the pen name of English writer and poet Violet Paget, notes that “the Olympic games, despite their choral processions and olive wreaths, retain something of the medieval tournament... Antiquity and chivalry, artists and Heroditus, are fused.”⁴² The historical appeal to the philhellenic traditions of the Olympics through celebration of the mind helped add to the appeal of the modern games.

From the literature that spanned the ancient and modern Olympic Games, we routinely see the integration of sports and the arts. In 1631, English poet and playwright Michael Drayton paying homage to the 1612 Dover Games romanticizes about the fusion of sport and art in the ancient Games.

In the noble times,
There to their Harps the poets sang their Rimes,
That whilst Greece flourisht, and was onely then
Nurse of all Arts, and of all famous men.⁴³

Even in the denigration of the ancient Olympics by Nero in the anonymous play *The Tragedy of Nero*, most likely written in 1624 by 17th century English historian Thomas May, you can still see the integration of art (music) in an ironic twist of Olympic fate:

Eighteen hundred and eight Crownes(i.e, won by Nero)
But did you marke the Greek Musitians
Behind his Chariot, hanging downe their heads,
Sham'd and overcome in their professions.⁴⁴

Writing two centuries later, American poet, playwright, and short story writer Edgar Allen Poe also saw the importance of the balance of mind, body, and spirit. In his *Epimanes*(1833,) Poe uses Olympic imagery to reveal man and his basic need for hero worship:

the crowd well satisfied of the faith, valor, wisdom, and divinity of their king . . . do think it no more than their duty to invest his brows (in addition to the poetic crown) with the wreath of victory in the footrace-a wreath which it is evident he must obtain at the celebration of the next Olympiad, and which, therefore, they now give him in advance.⁴⁵

By achieving the delicate balance of mind, body and spirit, the athlete participates in the quintessential Hellenic masculine model of Olympic competition. Literary references to the Olympics bridged the gap from antiquity to modernity providing the milieu necessary

for Coubertin to appeal to the masculine, aristocratic nature of the 19th century intellectual elite in reestablishing Olympic Games for his own masculinist ends.

COUBERTIN'S OLYMPISM

Pierre de Coubertin: A Product of His Times

Pierre de Coubertin was first and foremost an educational reformer. He was disenchanted with the educational system in France and having spent time in England and America, he hoped to change the French educational system to be more like the Anglo-Saxon model that he had come to embrace and idolize. The timing of the reestablishment of the modern Olympics could not have been better. International cosmopolitanism in the later 19th century provided the springboard for international sporting events. The May 1851 opening of the Crystal Palace Convention in London showcased Great Britain's industrial and artistic prowess.⁴⁶ Subsequent world's fairs in Paris including the exhibitions of 1867, 1878, and 1889 attracted millions of viewers and opened Paris to the world and provided a meeting place for intellectuals and workers in a variety of fields such as dentists, historians, statisticians.⁴⁷ Improvements in transportation, specifically transatlantic shipping, and in communication, underscored by the development of the sporting press, brought the world closer together.⁴⁸ Major technological developments improved athletic equipment, particularly the bicycle.⁴⁹ During the mid to later part of the 19th century, many international sporting demonstrations and contests in track and field, soccer, and crew in New York as well as pseudo-Olympic Games in Greece, Germany, Sweden, and England inspired a larger forum for athletes to meet.

These developments led Coubertin to proclaim in 1892 at the conclusion of Union of French Sports Association (USFSA) anniversary program:

As for athletics in general, I do not know what fate will be, but I wish to draw your attention to the important fact that it presents two new features, this time in the series of these secular transformations. It is democratic and international. The first of these characteristics will guarantee its future; anything that is not democratic is no longer viable today. As for the second, it opens unexpected prospects to us. There are people whom you call utopians when they talk to you about the disappearance of war, and you are not altogether wrong; but there are others who believe in the progressive reduction in the chances of war, and I see no utopian in this. It is clear that the telegraph, railways, the telephone, the passionate research in science, congresses and exhibitions have done more for peace than any treaty or convention. Well I hope that athletics will do even more. Those who have seen 30,000 people running through the rain to attend a football match will not think that I am exaggerating. Let us export rowers, runners, fencers; there is the free trade of the future, and on the day when it is introduced within the walls of old Europe the cause of peace will have received a new and mighty stay.

This is enough to encourage your servant to dream now about the second part of this programme; he hopes that you will help him as you help him hitherto, and that with you he will be able to continue and complete, on a basis suited to the conditions of modern life, this grandiose and salutary task, the restoration of the Olympic Games.⁵⁰

Although Coubertin saw the Olympics as part of an international peace movement that promoted sport education, his views on Olympism served discrete class and gender ends. The theory of Olympism that guided Coubertin to re-establish of the Olympic Games deserves attention.

Defining Coubertin's Theory of Olympism

Coubertin defined Olympism as “the religion of energy, the cultivation of intense will developed through the practice of manly sports, based on proper hygiene and public spiritness surrounded with art and thought.”⁵¹ Hellenism provided the historical milieu to make Coubertin's theory of Olympism appealing to his audience while serving

Coubertin's own discrete ends. Coubertin's views can at least in part be rationalized by literary references in the 17th to 19th centuries that served to secure the sanctity of the ancient games while at the same time appealing to an international, cosmopolitan audience.

Philosophical Tenets of Coubertin's Olympism

The philosophical elements of Coubertin's Olympism can be divided into the following elements: religious, elitism, knighthood, truce, and eurythmy. Each served to cement Coubertin's view that the Olympics were the domain of men only. In Coubertin's words:

The only true Olympic hero, as I have always said, is the individual male adult. Therefore, no women, no sports teams. But how can women, team sports teams, and all the other games not be allowed in during the Olympiad? At Olympia, there is a sacred enclosure, the Altis, set aside exclusively for the consecrated athlete. A vast communal life surged around the enclosure.⁵²

Religion. Coubertin believed that the fundamental aspect of Olympism was religion.

Pindar reminds us that in the ancient cosmology athletes can resemble gods.⁵³ By sculpting the body through exercise, the athlete honored the gods. Coubertin believed in the concept of the "religio athletae,"⁵⁴ that a modern athlete would be honoring his country and race through perfecting the physical body in a way similar to the way ancient athletes appealed to the Gods. The opening and closing ceremonies in the modern Games showcased the religious aspects of the Olympics in a sense returning the international experience of the modern Games to its ancient roots. In appealing to the philhellenic nature of his notion of Olympism, Coubertin related: "this is the same religious experience that led the young Hellenes, eager for the victory or their muscles, to the foot

of the altar of Zeus.”⁵⁵ Coubertin connected the same religious aspects of the ancient games with the modern ones.

The Greek poet Panagiotis Soutsos invoked a Hellenic appeal to the ancient games and the divine power of the immortal Greeks when he decided that ancient Greece should restore its ancient glory through hosting the Olympic Games. In his 1833 poem “Dialogues of the Dead” he employs Plato who surveys a land in disrepair and utters “Where are all your great theatres and marble statues? Where are your Olympic Games?”⁵⁶ Through his appeal to the best in Greek society, Soutsos wanted to restore contemporary Greek society to the glory of ancient Greeks. Soutsos succeeded through the help of Evangelis Zappas, a wealthy grain dealer, to restore the Olympic Games of 1859, 1870, 1875, and 1888, contributing to the Olympic movement of the 19th century through an aristocratic appeal to Greece’s noble traditions. The appeal of Hellenism played into the appeal of Olympism.

Elitism. The second aspect of Coubertin’s Olympism was its elitism. Coubertin believed that the Olympic athlete constituted an elite fraternity. Part of Coubertin’s goal was to transform France’s education system by providing competitive athletics along the English and American models. He spoke of the harmonious balance of mind and body, *mens sana in corpore sano*, a sound mind in a sound body.⁵⁷ From his experiences with Thomas Arnold and the English educational system and the developing Muscular Christianity movement of the 19th century, he saw the benefits of youth being able to compete in sport. Father Henri-Martin Didon, a Catholic leader in France, also assisted Coubertin in trying to bring sports to Didon’s Catholic school. Above the entrance of

Didon's school chiseled in stone was the motto *Citius, Altius, Fortius* (Faster, Higher, Stronger)⁵⁸ the motto Coubertin later employed as the official slogan of the modern Olympic Games.

Coubertin espoused that only a certain number of athletes would be able to excel at an intense level of physical training. As Coubertin put it:

it would not necessarily follow that all these young athletes would be "Olympians," i.e. men capable of contesting for world records...For every hundred who engage in physical culture, fifty must engage in sports. For every fifty who engage in sport, twenty must specialize. For every twenty who specialize, five must be capable of astonishing feats.⁵⁹

One can not help but notice Coubertin's use of the word "men." He had no intention of including women in his vision of an Olympian. Coubertin felt it was not enough to be an elite athlete. He perceived that there was a chivalrous bond between Olympic athletes in competition.

Knighthood. The third aspect of Coubertin's Olympism was knighthood. Coubertin understood that there was a *fraternitas*, a brotherhood amongst strong, fierce, rugged competitors. Coubertin acknowledged that, in antiquity, the Olympic spirit was, in its purest form, composed of athletes competing for competition's sake -- no riches or rewards, merely the love of athletes "seeking together" as chivalrous knights battling for glory. Coubertin put it succinctly:

Being an elite (athlete) is not enough. This elite must also be a *knighthood*. Knights, above all else are "brothers in arms," brave energetic men united by a bond that is stronger than that of mere camaraderie, which is powerful enough in itself. In chivalry, the idea of competition, of effort opposing effort for the love of effort itself, of courteous and violent struggle, is superimposed on the notion of mutual assistance, the basis of camaraderie. In antiquity, this was the Olympic spirit in its purest form.⁶⁰

Writing in 1880 English writer and poet Vernon Lee argued that “the Olympic Games, despite their choral processions and olive wreaths, retain something of a medieval tournament...Antiquity and chivalry, artists and Heroditus are fused.”⁶¹ In the end, Coubertin believed that the Olympic competition of the world’s top athletes took the competitors to a divine level of performance in the solemn setting of the Olympic cathedral. Unlike war, where brave young souls fight for national and international supremacy, Coubertin felt the Olympics should be a break or “truce” from national tensions to celebrate every four years the rebirth of a new succession of youth.

Peace. The fourth aspect of his Olympism was peace: the Olympics as an international peace movement. He believed that a quadrennial peace among nations should be observed while each nation took time out to honor its youth in athletic competition. Coubertin capitalized on the Olympic Games as an honorable competition among an elite fraternity of athletes to foster his appeal of the Olympics as an appeal to antiquity. Coubertin insisted that the circadian rhythm of the games was paramount. By keeping the four year rhythm, the connection between past, present and future Olympics could be maintained.

Coubertin purported that the rhythmic cycle of the games was a celebration of human springtime. He wrote that:

human springtime is expressed in the young adult male, who can be compared to a superb machine in which all the gears have been set in place, ready for full operation. That is the person in whose honor the Olympic Games must be celebrated and their rhythm organized and maintained, because it is him that the near future depends, as well as the harmonious passage from the past to the future.⁶²

Coubertin perceived that the young adult males of each nation would be honored by calling a truce for a short period to celebrate and achieve athletic greatness together.

Coubertin emphasized the international implications in reestablishing the Games,

The re-establishment of the Olympic Games, on the basis and conditions in keeping with the needs of modern life, would bring together, every four years, representatives of the nations of the world, and one is permitted to think that these peaceful, courteous contests constitute the best form of internationalism.⁶³

Eurythmy. The final characteristic of Coubertin's Olympism was the concept of eurythmy. Coubertin defined eurythmy as the integration of arts and athletic competition. Coubertin posed the question, "Can one celebrate human springtime (Olympic Games) without inviting the mind to take part?"⁶⁴ Arts and sciences in harmonious concordance with sports lifted the Olympic Games to a divine level. Eurythmy helped the Olympic athlete to achieve the delicate balance of mind, body, and spirit--the human trinity.

Coubertin frames the discussion as follows,

Proper proportion is the sister of order...The term that springs to mind is "eurythmia"... In French, we focus on the first syllable. It evokes the idea of the beautiful, the perfect. Everything that is properly proportioned is eurythmic. It was Hellenism, above all else that advocated measure and proper proportion, co-creators of beauty, grace, and strength. We must return to these Greek concepts to offset the appalling ugliness of the industrial age through which we have just lived.⁶⁵

Coubertin thought that the Olympic athlete could be lifted to a divine level through showcasing his artistic talents in Olympic Games competition and he pushed for specific artistic competitions to be included in the modern Olympic Games. As

Coubertin reminded the International Olympic Committee,

The time has come to enter a new phase, and to restore the Olympiads to their original beauty. At the time of the Olympia's splendor, and even later when Nero, the conquerer of Greece, made it his ambition to gather the ever-desired laurels along the banks of the Alphaeus, the arts and literature joined with sports to ensure the greatness of the Olympic Games.⁶⁶

By integrating art into athletics, Coubertin hoped to appeal to the mind of the Olympic athlete and the spectator of the Olympic spectacle. Through ritual ceremony, music, and pageantry the Olympic Games were not only a connection to the past, but, Coubertin hoped, also to the gods. As Pindar noted, “the gods are the friends of the Games.”⁶⁷

Coubertin’s Olympic vision, a Hellenic appeal to the sanctity of the ancient Olympic Games, was undoubtedly appealing to the international, cosmopolitan audience of the late 19th century. The literary references of the period between the 17th and 19th century served as the Olympic bridge to antiquity. Coubertin accomplished discrete ends by positioning the modern Olympic Games in a historical context palatable to his masculinist audience. Coubertin cemented his vision of the modern Olympic athlete as the heroic young, male adult celebrating human springtime within the four year rhythmic cycle of the Olympic Games. Coubertin summarized the important meaning and value of the Olympic Games in terms of his own purposes:

The Olympic Games are not merely world championships, but quadrennial festival of universal youth, of the human springtime, the festival of passionate efforts, multiple ambitions, and of all the forms of youthful activity of each generation as it stands at the threshold of life. It was no mere happenstance that brought together writers and artists to Olympia long ago, gathering them around sports in antiquity. The comparable assembly achieved the prestige that the institution enjoyed for so long. Since I wished to restore not so much the form as the principle of this age-old institution, because I saw in it an educational orientation that had once again become essential for my country and for humanity, I had to try to restore the powerful supporting structures that had once shored up: the intellectual support, the moral support, and to a certain extent the religious support – to which the modern world added two new forces: technical improvements and democratic internationalism.⁶⁸

Women did not figure in Coubertin’s modern Olympics as more than a background spectator, as award presenter.

Coubertin and the role of women in the modern Olympic Games

Coubertin felt that women should not participate in the Olympic Games. He saw the adult male athlete as the Olympic hero, a symbolic figure to be reborn with each successive Olympiad.⁶⁹ Concerning women's participation in physical education, Coubertin asked:

Can the young women I have mentioned before, with justified cruelty, acquire moral sense through sports, too? I do not believe so. Physical education, athletic physical culture, yes. This is excellent for young girls, for women. But the ruggedness of male exertion, the basis of athletic education when prudently but resolutely applied, is much to be dreaded when it comes to the female. That ruggedness is achieved physically only when nerves are stretched beyond normal capacity, and morally only when the most precious feminine characteristics are nullified.⁷⁰

As Coubertin later confirmed, "my concept of the Olympic games is the solemn and periodic exaltation of male athleticism, based on internationalism, by means of fairness, in an artistic setting, with the applause of women as a reward."⁷¹ For Coubertin, the balance of the human trinity (mind, body, soul) in the Olympics was unattainable for women. Women did not have the same access as men to gymnasias and athletic education. Competition was discouraged because it was seen as unwomanly and could lead to overexertion and physical collapse.⁷² Darwinism and its slogan "survival of the fittest" greatly influenced educational theory of the 19th century. Human nature is a product of evolution and primitive man was a hunter and a fighter. Primitive women were not, as Luther Gulick, a pioneer of American physical education in the late 19th and early 20th century, explains, "Boyhood and manhood have...for ages long been tested and produced by athletic sports. They were predominantly the hunters or fighters..... The case is very different for women. They cared for the home."⁷³ Coubertin's masculinist approach in

systematically excluding women from the early Olympic Games, as we shall see, had debilitating effects on women's participation in the modern Olympics throughout the 20th and 21st centuries.

The noble, honorable Olympic competitions of Robert Dover's 17th century Cotsworth Olympics and Dr. William Penny Brookes Wenlock 19th century Olympic Games helped inspire Coubertin to establish the modern Olympic Games. It was not just the physical administration of the Wenlock Games, but the Hellenic vision of nobility, honor and goodwill that appealed to Coubertin. Unfortunately, he only saw possibilities for the individual male hero. Coubertin admired the vision of Dr. Brookes as summarized in Brookes' Olympian Wenlock society:

the purpose of the society is to contribute to the development of the physical, moral, and intellectual qualities of the residents, through the encouragement of outdoor exercises, and through the annual competition for prizes and medals intended to reward the best literary and artistic productions, as well as the most remarkable feats of strength and skill.⁷⁴

Coubertin further acknowledged that, in the chivalrous customs of the middle ages, Brookes had the winners of the Wenlock Olympics "bend his knee to receive the symbolic laurel from the hands of a lady."⁷⁵ This statement encapsulates Coubertin's own view of women's role in the Olympics as mere spectators and award givers. As Coubertin later stated, "Personally I do not approve of women's participation in public competitions, which does not mean that they should not engage in a great many sports, merely that they should not become the focus of a spectacle. At the Olympic Games, their role should be above all to crown the victors, as was the case in the ancient tournaments."⁷⁶

Throughout his time on the International Olympic Committee, Coubertin was steadfast in his opposition to women participating in the Olympics. In the ancient games, women were not admitted to the games. As President of the International Olympic Committee (IOC), Coubertin was pressured against his objections to include women as participants in the Games. But he still did his best to ensure that any participation by women in the Olympic Games would be if not forbidden as he wanted, limited and restricted to “less strenuous” individual sports like golf and tennis. In 1928, in a message to participants at the Amsterdam Olympics, he put it this way: “as for the participation of women in the (Olympic) Games, I continue to oppose the move. It is against my wishes that they have been admitted to an increasing number of events.”⁷⁷ Women still face the remnants of these masculinist perspectives, particularly in sports language and media coverage today.

WOMEN’S PARTICIPATION IN THE MODERN OLYMPICS

Coubertin was the driving force in the revival of the 1896 Olympic Games in Athens. Whether he brought the Games back as a response to a growing international cosmopolitanism, to promote world peace, or to provide moral development to an educated elite through physical education, he clearly sought to exclude women. No women competed in the 1896 games. As historian Allen Guttman puts it: “Coubertin had not planned for the admission of women, did not want women to be admitted, and fought their admission for more than 30 years.”⁷⁸ Coubertin’s biggest concern was the spectacle of women in the Olympics. He felt that women would not be viewed as athletes, but as attractive female bodies (i.e. sex symbols). Coubertin was right about the

hegemonic masculinity (whether stated or not) that still persists in the Olympic games through the language and visual depiction of women in sports. Coubertin's own hegemonic attitudes and those of others on the IOC created roadblocks to the expansion of the Olympics in terms of the number of women's events and participants.

Women's Participation in the Olympics 1896-2006

Women have made slow growth in the Olympics in terms of number of athletes and events (see Table 1). As you can see, the number of female participants in the modern Olympic Games has increased from zero in 1896 to 4,306 in the 2004. Women represented more than 40% of the 10,568 Olympians at the 2004 Athens Games.

Women's sports were slow to be added to the games. The Paris games included women's golf and tennis. In 1904 St. Louis, archery was the only sport that women were allowed to compete in. In 1908 London, only tennis, archery and figure skating were included for women.⁷⁹

Coubertin continued to fight against adding women events to the games. In a 1912 letter to the Organizing Committee for the Stockholm Games, Coubertin tried to keep women out of his brainchild, the newly created Olympic pentathlon event:

As to the modern pentathlon I am personally opposed to the admittance of ladies as competitors in the Olympic Games. But as they are this time admitted as tennis players, swimmers, etc. I do not see on what ground we should stand to refuse them in the Pentathlon. However I repeat that I greatly regret the fact. Therefore I leave it to you to decide and if you refuse or accept the engagement, I shall agree with you.⁸⁰

Table 1

Women's Participation in The Modern Olympic Games 1896-2006

<u>Year</u>	<u>Place</u>	<u># of Male Athletes</u>	<u># of Female Athletes</u>	<u>% Female Olympians</u>
1896	Athens	241	0	0.0%
1900	Paris	975	22	2.2
1904	St. Louis	645	6	0.9
1908	London	1,971	37	1.8
1912	Stockholm	2,359	48	2.0
1916	No Games	-----	-----	-----
1920	Antwerp	2,561	65	2.5
1924	Chamonix	247	11	4.3
1924	Paris	2,954	135	4.4
1928	St. Moritz	438	26	5.6
1928	Amsterdam	2,606	277	9.6
1932	Lake Placid	231	21	8.3
1932	Los Angeles	1,206	126	9.0
1936	Garmisch-Partenkirchen	566	80	12.4
1936	Berlin	3,632	331	8.4
1940	No Games	-----	-----	-----
1944	No Games	-----	-----	-----
1948	St. Moritz	592	77	11.5
1948	London	3,714	390	9.5
1952	Oslo	585	109	15.7
1952	Helsinki	4,436	519	10.5
1956	Cortina D'Ampezzo	687	134	16.3
1956	Melbourne	2,938	376	11.3
1960	Squaw Valley	521	144	21.7
1960	Rome	4,727	611	11.4
1964	Innsbruck	892	199	18.2
1964	Tokyo	4,473	678	13.2
1968	Grenoble	947	211	18.2
1968	Mexico City	4735	781	14.2
1972	Sapporo	801	205	20.4
1972	Munich	6,075	1,059	14.8
1976	Innsbruck	892	231	20.6
1976	Montreal	4,915	1,274	20.6
1980	Lake Placid	232	840	20.7
1980	Moscow	4,064	1,115	21.5
1984	Sarajevo	274	998	21.5
1984	Los Angeles	5,263	1,566	22.9
1988	Calgary	1,122	301	21.2
1988	Seoul	6,197	2,194	26.1
1992	Albertville	1,313	488	27.1
1992	Barcelona	6,652	2,704	28.9
1994	Lillehammer	1,215	522	30.1
1996	Atlanta	6,806	3,512	34.0
1998	Nagano	1,389	787	36.2
2000	Sydney	6,582	4,069	38.2
2002	Salt Lake City	1,513	886	36.9
2004	Athens	6,262	4,306	40.7
2006	Turin	1,548	960	38.3

Source: Olympic Movement⁸¹

There was also resistance to women participating in the swimming competitions at the 1912 Olympic Games because it was felt that women's bodies would be the spectacle and not their accomplishments. Feminist Rose Scott from Australia resigned from her post as president of the Australia Swimming Association in protest of women's swimming being added to the 1912 Games.⁸² From a theoretical perspective, women have long struggled over the role of the body and the power relationships involved. Some feminists are particularly concerned about oppression based on "the appropriation of women's bodies by patriarchy."⁸³ However, from Foucault, we can see that there is not only a biological element to the oppression of women by men in hegemonic ways, but also a cultural determination inscribed on the female body. Foucault elaborated in *The History of Sexuality*:

The purpose of the present study is to show how deployments of power are directly connected to the body-to bodies, functions, physiological processes, sensations, and pleasures; far from the body having to be effaced, what is needed is to make visible through an analysis in which the biological and the historical are not consecutive to one another... but are bound together in an increasingly complex fashion in accordance with the development of the modern technologies of power that take life as their objective.⁸⁴

For Foucault, sexuality is assigned not just on the basis of biological, natural differences, but by the knowledge and male/female power relationships that are inscribed on the female body through cultural representations. Cultural representations in this case are the specific images portrayed by the media coverage of Olympians. These media images contribute to the masculine hegemonic power relationships that some feminists have so severely attacked.

Media Images of Modern Women Olympians

Women Olympians are routinely trivialized and marginalized through modern depictions in the media. Research has shown that despite heightened sensitivities to the dangers of sexist language, the language of sport contains linguistic variations that are neither random nor indiscriminate but are in fact structured and discriminatory. Specifically, studies have shown differential gender expectations and emphases in terms of athleticism, physicality, and performance,⁸⁵ differential use of verbal descriptors to transmit information about sports,⁸⁶ differential treatment of character flaws,⁸⁷ the construction of the psychological “otherness” of women athletes,⁸⁸ the “denial of power” for women in team sports,⁸⁹ the differential framing of success and failure on the basis of gender and gender stereotypes,⁹⁰ and an emphasis on women’s personal lives.⁹¹ These linguistic variations are not only a direct consequence of the structured social variations found in gender relations in general but a significant, contributory factor to the perpetuation of gender inequality itself. This was true of media coverage of modern women Olympians as their Olympic participations increased.

Women continued to make progress in the Games through the heroic efforts of numerous pioneers. Rival Olympics for women, such as the *Olympiques Feminines* of Camille Blanc and Alice Milliat, were resounding successes between 1921 and 1936 furthering the cause of women in track and field.⁹² In 1928 the IOC relented and allowed women’s track and field events in the Games. The events included 100 and 800 meters, 4X100 meter relay, high jump, and discus. There was a controversy over the 800 meter race. *The New York Times* reported that “at the finish six of the runners were completely exhausted and fell headlong to the ground....eleven wretched women were strewn upon

the cinder track.”⁹³ From the pressure of the press, the IOC removed women’s track and field events from the 1932 Games, and later placing them back in the Olympic program allowing for Babe Didrickson to have her memorable games. Women’s bodies were once again the objects of media scrutiny.

Babe Didrickson was a huge success at the 1932 Olympic Games where she won gold medals in the 80 meter hurdles and the javelin, but was despised by the media as a “muscle moll.” Popular sports columnist Paul Gallico remarked at the time:

She was the muscle moll to end all muscle molls, the complete girl athlete....She was the tomboy who never wore makeup, who shingled her hair until it was a short as a boy’s and never bothered to comb it, who didn’t care about clothes and who despised silk underthings....She had a boy’s body, slim, straight, curveless, and she looked her best in a track suit. She hated women and loved to beat them. She was not at that time (1932), pretty...She had good, clear, gray-green eyes, but she was what is commonly described as hatchet-faced. She looked and acted more like a boy than a girl, but she was in every respect a wholesome, normal female (i.e., she was not a lesbian). She was as tough as rawhide leather.⁹⁴

Unlike Didrickson, Eleanor Holm, 1932 gold winner of the 100-meter breaststroke, was described by *The Los Angeles Times* “as a most beautiful girl athlete.” Holm made the following comments:

It’s great fun to swim and a great thrill to compete in the Olympics, but the moment I find my swimming is making me athletic looking, giving me big bulky muscles, making me look like an Amazon rather than a woman, I’ll toss it to the side.⁹⁵

The juxtaposition of these two statements from the media coverage of the 1932 Olympic Games shows the linguistic practices that reinforced masculine hegemony and gender inequality. The media trivialized Didrickson’s outstanding performance by focusing on her physical appearance. Didrickson was presented as other than the normal feminine ideal: “she has a boy’s body.”⁹⁶ Holm, on the other hand, was trivialized by descriptive infantilization; by being referred to as a most beautiful girl athlete. Thus, the media’s use

of language has reduced her from a female athlete to a child athlete diminishing her accomplishments.

Foucault's power/knowledge principles frame gender inequalities. As Foucault says:

The body is the inscribed surface of events (traced by language and dissolved by ideas), the locus of dissociated self (adopting the illusion of a substantial unity), and a volume in perpetual disintegration. Genealogy as an analysis of descent, is thus situated within the articulation of the body and history. Its task is to expose a body totally imprinted by history and the processes of history's destruction of the body.⁹⁷

In looking at gender relations in the context of the history of the modern Olympics, the media's language portrays the gendered female body inscribed with cultural identity. As her comments to the media reflect, Holm had internalized coded messages of what the media and masculine hegemonic society expected of her. Her comments appealed to what her audience wanted. In talking about the slanting of the press and audience preferred readings, communication researcher James Hallmark concludes:

media discourse presenting fantasy themes subjugating women athletes is hegemonic; in concert with the actions of women athletes, it acts as a fantasy theme reinforcing a rhetorical version and giving birth to additional preferred readings subjugating women's athletics in short it is a cycle.⁹⁸

In the case of the swimmer Holm, the fantasy was that she was athletic and sexy. Once she became too muscular, she no longer fulfilled the preferred reading of the hegemonic reader. We can see the sexed body as a two-sided form of social control.

As we move from the Olympic athletes of the 1930s to recent athletes, the media focuses on athletes such as Florence Griffith-Joyner, Katarina Witt, and Venus Williams. Some feminists have complained that most photograph and media descriptions of modern

Olympians pay too much attention on women's physical attributes (body features) or their personal lives (marriages and children) and not enough on their athletic abilities. Media depictions of women Olympians represent a form of social control. In some cases the media depicts Olympians as sex objects. As professional researcher and writer Penny Hastings asks, why does *Sports Illustrated* refer to Olympic figure skater Katarina Witt as "So fresh-faced, so blue-eyed, so ruby-lipped, so 12-car pileup gorgeous, 5 feet 5 inches and 114 pounds worth of peacekeeping missile?"⁹⁹ The connection of sexuality, sport, and the ancient and modern Olympics is indisputable. As historian Guttmann points out:

When Greek men and boys journeyed to Olympia to compete in the great panhellenic festival that honored Zeus, when Greek girls ran races on the same site for an olive branch and a portion of a sacred cow, everyone seems to have understood that physically trained bodies, observed in motion or at rest, can be sexually attractive.¹⁰⁰

By photographing women Olympic athletes in passive poses, hegemonic control is exerted by the male viewer over the passive female Olympian. The politics of gender image has become a little more complex because of the increased sexualization of "sportspersons" (i.e. tennis player, Maria Sharapova) and the new marketing of female celebrities in commercials. Olympians trade gold medals for commercial endorsements, as Mary Lou Retton did in 1984 when she appeared on Wheatties boxes after her gold medal gymnastics performance in the Los Angeles Games.

Critiques of recent Olympic Games have shown how the media routinely deemphasize the athletic-related tasks of women's athletic performances and focuses more on non-performance attributes. For example, in their analysis of selected print media passages describing the gold medal performances of U.S. women's teams in the 1996 and 1998 Olympics, Ray Jones, Audrey Murrell, and Jennifer Jackson found that

female athletes were judged and depicted using traditional beliefs about gender whether the women were competing in traditionally gender-appropriate (tennis, gymnastics) or in nontraditional gender-inappropriate sports (basketball, soccer.)¹⁰¹ In 1988, Margaret Duncan found that Olympic sportswomen were described by the media in contradictory terms; on the one hand being “powerful, precise, skillful,” and, on the other hand, “cute and toy or animal-like.”¹⁰² In a 1992 analysis of newspaper accounts of the 1984 and 1988 games, John Lee argues that the marginalization and trivialization of women were embedded in the quantitative coverage of the Games.¹⁰³ The net effect of the media portrayals of women Olympians is that through ambivalent language women’s athletic accomplishments are ignored and a power mechanism of social control is employed with focus centered on physical rather than performance attributes.

Masculine hegemonic control is also maintained through descriptive comparisons which assume the male Olympian as the norm. As a *Newsweek* article featuring 1984 Olympic basketball player Cheryl Miller stated: “After 92 Fuddy-duddy years, women’s basketball has a heroine who plays the game like a man.”¹⁰⁴ Linguistic practices here serve to define women’s activities in terms of the male as normative. Thus male athletic activities are separate and unequal to those of women Olympians, marginalizing women’s accomplishments in the process. There were signs even in 1984 that media portrayals of Olympians might be changing. In a contrast of media reports of 1932 and 1984, sports researcher Beth Allyson Posnack found the runners and throwers were no longer photographed at poolside in evening gowns and high heels as in 1932:

The American media of 1984 identified...female athletes by their achievements—not by their physical attributes. Clearly, the terms “woman” and “athlete” were no longer separate notions in 1984. Mary Decker was an athlete just as Carl Lewis was an athlete. There was no need to remind the reading public

that Mary was also a woman who was capable of dressing up and applying makeup.¹⁰⁵

Gradually, women athletes have gained greater media acceptance and the quality and quantity of media coverage has improved. In their analysis of the producing network's on-air Olympic discourse, communication researchers Susan Eastman and Tyler Billings found in 1999 parity in mentions of athletes' names and surmised that "the anchoring hosts were apparently striving for gender balance."¹⁰⁶ Furthermore, more than 40 percent of the allotted space in the *Los Angeles Times* and *New York Times* for the 1984 Olympic Games featured women.¹⁰⁷

Today, media's use of sexist and discriminatory language is under scrutiny by the public through the medium of the twenty four hour daily radio and television news media outlets. Popular morning radio talk show host Don Imus was recently fired for referring to the Rutgers NCAA runner-up Women's Basketball team as "rough girls with tattoos and a bunch of nappy-headed hos."¹⁰⁸ After Imus lost his job over denigrating the Rutgers basketball team, continued focus centered on hegemonic media descriptions of athletes.

Masculinist Coubertin and the Olympic Games of the 21st century

As the world awaits the Beijing Games of 2008, Coubertin would have been impressed by the raw size of the Olympic Games: over 10,000 participants and approximately 200 nations are expected to compete in the 2008 Games. He would also have liked the attempts by the IOC to call an Olympic Truce during the 2004 Athens games as the United States was on the verge of entering Iraq for an extended war. Women Olympians have made inroads in terms of quantity of Olympic participants as

well as the quality of their performances. The 1996 Olympic Games were seen in the United States as the ‘Women’s Games,’ as the United States excelled in winning more gold medals in more sports than the men.¹⁰⁹ Moreover, the 2000 Olympic success of the U.S. women soccer team showed that women soccer players served as athletic role models for all women, regardless of age.¹¹⁰ What we see in the modern women athlete is the fulfillment of the moral development that Coubertin espoused after spending time at the English boarding schools more than a century ago. With the strides women athletes have made today, maybe Coubertin would have modified his masculinist position, a position that to some extent still grips the International Olympic Committee.

The Olympic literary references that permeate the period between the ancient games and the modern games provide the perpetual groundwork for the successful installation of the Olympic Games in 1896. On one hand, literary references influenced and facilitated Coubertin’s masculinist view of Olympism, a view based on his desire to reform an elite aristocratic French educational system by appealing to the Hellenic glory and reverence for the Ancient Olympic games for his own discrete class race, and gender ends. On the other hand, the literary references enlivened the Games and allowed their heritage to reach a larger audience than the elite male aristocrats who encompassed Coubertin’s Olympic idea couched as it was in international cosmopolitanism and world peace. Greater international media interest in the Games provided greater access to the Olympics to a larger, more diverse social spectrum and ultimately more women than Coubertin could have imagined. From Foucault, we have seen that the genealogy of the Olympic idea is the articulation of its living tradition through the cultural imprint on the body. The symbolic Olympic torch and historical literary references to the Olympic

Games illuminate the destructive marks that the female Olympian body bears. The Olympic Games constitutes an enduring legacy that, as Pindar says, eclipses all other sports like the sun eclipses the stars.¹¹¹

- ¹ William H. Race, *Pindar: Olympian Odes/Pythian Odes* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), p. 47.
- ² Judith Swaddling, *The Ancient Olympic Games* (Austin, TX: Univ. of Texas Press, 1999), p. 100.
- ³ Pierre de Coubertin: Nobert Müller (ed.), *Olympism: Selected Writings* (Lusanne: International Olympic Committee, 1980), p. 44.
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