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THE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY OF THE OLYMPICS GAMES: OLYMPIC WOMEN

Abstract - This paper will review the history of women's involvement in the Olympic Games, how gender is socially (re)constructed through these events, current issues facing women who compete at the Olympic/Paralympic level, and what social responsibility the Olympic movement might assume to improve the experiences of Olympic women in the future.

Keywords: Olympism; Gender; Social Responsibility.

A RESPONSABILIDADE SOCIAL DOS JOGOS OLÍMPICOS: MULHERES OLÍMPICAS

Resumo - Este artigo irá analisar a história do envolvimento das mulheres nos Jogos Olímpicos, a forma como o gênero é (re)construído socialmente através destes eventos, as questões atuais enfrentadas pelas mulheres que competem no nível Olímpico/Paraolímpico e a responsabilidade social que o movimento olímpico pode assumir para melhorar a experiência das mulheres olímpicas no futuro.

Palavras-chave: Olimpismo; Gênero; Responsabilidade Social.

RESPONSABILIDAD SOCIAL DE LOS JUEGOS OLÍMPICOS: LAS MUJERES OLÍMPICAS

Resumen - En este artículo se examinará la historia de la participación de las mujeres en los Juegos Olímpicos, cómo el género es (re)construido socialmente a través de estos eventos, los problemas actuales que enfrentan las mujeres que compiten a nivel Olímpico/Paralímpico y la responsabilidad social que el movimiento olímpico puede tomar para mejorar la experiencia de las mujeres Olímpicas en el futuro.

Palabras clave: Olimpismo; Género; Responsabilidad Social.

As the global sport media spotlight will once again shine on Brazil when it hosts the 2016 Olympic and Paralympic Games, one of the issues that likely will be scrutinised is whether Rio 2016 will follow in the footsteps of London 2012 with regards to the perceived advances made in gender equity and women's participation. The London Organising Committee for the Olympic Games in 2012 (LOCOG) was the first to have gender equity as a guiding principle for the organisation and operation of both the Olympic and Paralympic Games[1]. Polley[2] (p. 30) tells us that "a small revolution in gendered sport seems to have taken place" at London 2012, with women able to compete in all sports on the Olympic programme, the USA sending more female than male athletes for the first time ever, and the Games were hailed by some in the mass media as "The Women's Games".

My analysis of Olympic women is informed by a critical interactionist perspective and specifically the work of Erving Goffman. Throughout his writings, Goffman demonstrates an awareness of how gender, and specifically women's gender, may be interactionally consequential[3]. For Goffman[4] (p. 315), gender identity involves "the deepest sense of what one is". In his key publications on gender difference, Goffman dismisses biological differences as the justification for the 'othering' of women, and argues that society's desire to magnify gender differences means that gender has greater social significance than class and other social divisions and that "gender not religion is the opiate of the masses"[4] (p. 315). Coakley and Pike[5] argue that gender ideology in most societies is based on a simple binary classification model which classifies people into one of two sex categories (male or female). In most societies, men have been privileged in terms of access to power and resources; and sport itself continues to be male identified, male dominated and male centred, which means that men are used as the standard for judging sports and are also the expected focus of attention in sports.

Goffman's[6] (p. 6) main interest was with gendered displays which he regarded as "the shadow and the substance" of gendered social life, and he described people's willingness to adhere to depictions of masculinity and femininity in terms of "the ritualization of subordination"[6] (p. 40). It is notable that, in the seminal and highly celebrated work of the feminist Judith Butler[7] (p. 25), her performative conceptions of gender resonate closely with Goffman's[8] thesis that human behaviour may be

understood through the (gendered) interactions between an 'actor' and their 'audience' on the social stage of everyday life; a process that he termed dramaturgy.

An understanding of the gendered history of the Olympic movement starts with Baron Pierre de Coubertin, largely credited with responsibility for establishing the modern Olympic movement and founding the International Olympic Committee (IOC), who intended to re-create an Olympic event that celebrated male athleticism[1]. He famously wrote an article about women and the Olympic Games in 1912 in which, following Goffman[4], he magnifies gender difference and 'others' women in stating that the inclusion of women at the Olympic Games would be "impractical, uninteresting, ungainly, and, I do not hesitate to add, improper"[9] (p. 713). One hundred years later, the Games were held in London, UK, and the former British Minister for the Olympics stated that "It will be an embarrassment for London 2012 if there isn't an equal number of events for men and women at the Games" (Tessa Jowell, 2009). After the London 2012 Games, the then President of the IOC claimed that the London 2012 Olympics represent a "major boost for gender equality" (Jacques Rogge, 2012), and the UN Secretary General's Special Advisor on Sport for Development and Peace claimed that the London 2012 Games were "a very encouraging step in the fight for gender equality and women's empowerment in and through sport" (Wilfried Lemke, in Safai[10]).

Participation statistics demonstrate a trend toward increased participation of women in the Olympic Games (see Table 1) with London 2012 seeing the highest percentage (44%) of female athletes of any modern Olympic Games. This figure is higher than the Winter Olympic Games and, in the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi, women made up only 40% of the participants, which was a slight decline on women's representation at the 2010 Winter Olympics in Vancouver[11,12]. In London 2012, women competed in every sport, and no countries prevented women from participating in the Games[13]. The gradual move toward greater gender equity must, of course, be understood against a socio-economic backdrop of the wider social movements for women's rights, the introduction of sporting physical activities for women and girls in some educational institutions, the increasing presence of women in the workplace in many societies, and the call from feminist activists for recognition that "the personal is political" [2,10].

Table 1 Male and female athletes in the modern Summer Olympic Games, 1896–2012[5] (p. 241)

Year	Place	Countries represented	Male athletes	Female athletes	Percentage female
1896	Athens	14	241	0	0.0
1900	Paris	24	975	22	2.2
1904	St Louis	12	645	6	0.9
1908	London	22	1971	37	1.8
1912	Stockholm	28	2359	48	2.0
1916	Olympics scheduled for Berlin cancelled (First World War)				
1920	Antwerp	29	2561	63	2.5
1924	Paris	44	2954	135	4.4
1928	Amsterdam	46	2606	277	9.6
1932	Los Angeles	37	1206	126	9.5
1936	Berlin	49	3632	331	8.4
1940	Olympics scheduled for Tokyo cancelled (Second World War)				
1944	Olympics cancelled (Second World War)				
1948	London	59	3714	390	9.5
1952	Helsinki	69	4436	519	10.5
1956	Melbourne	72	2938	376	11.3
1960	Rome	83	4727	611	11.4
1964	Tokyo	93	4473	678	13.2
1968	Mexico City	112	4735	781	14.2
1972	Munich	122	6075	1059	14.8
1976	Montreal	92	4824	1260	20.7
1980	Moscow	81	4064	1115	21.5
1984	Los Angeles	140	5263	1566	22.9
1988	Seoul	159	6197	2194	26.1
1992	Barcelona	169	6652	2704	28.9
1996	Atlanta	197	6806	3512	34.0*
2000	Sydney	199	6582	4069	38.2
2004	Athens	201	6452	4329	40.9

2008	Beijing	204	6450	4637	41.8
2012	London	205	6068	4835	44.3

However, these have been relatively recent trends as women fought against male hegemony and views that their bodies (and ability to reproduce) would be damaged by participation in athletic competition. As Coubertin himself stated, "where sports were concerned, (a woman's) greatest accomplishment was to encourage her sons to excel rather than seek records for herself"[10] (p. 53). A key player for inclusion of women in the Olympics was Alice Milliat from France, who established the Federation Sportive Feminine Internationale (FSFI) in 1921 and organised the first ever Women's Olympic Games in 1922[10]. These Games never enjoyed official status and, by 1936 the FSFI ceased to exist, and the IOC had secured full control over women's involvement in the Olympics regulating in which events and under what conditions they could participate. Global events, such as world wars and the depression, suppressed women's gains in sport, and it was not until the emergence of second-wave feminism in the mid-twentieth century, along with the entry into the Olympics of the Soviet Bloc nations after the Second World War, that we witnessed a significant expansion of the women's programme[10]. Indeed, it was 1976 before the proportion of female competitors exceeded twenty per cent[1]. In particular, women were not able to take part in team sports at the Olympics until 1964 (in volleyball) or in 'netless' team sports until basketball and team rowing were introduced in 1976; they also were not permitted to run in the marathon until 1984, compete in wrestling until 2004, take part in boxing until 2012, or participate in ski jumping until 2014[5,11]. These marginal advances toward a gender equal Olympics are often viewed as inflated determinants of women's progress in sport more generally[15]. In reality, there have always been more events for men than women at both the Summer and Winter Olympic Games, with 30 more medal events for men than women in London 2012, and there have always been more male participants at the Olympic Games, with 1233 more men than women competing in London 2012[13].

Progress toward gender equity is also not yet global with females in many countries still a long way from achieving full participation in sports. Following Goffman[6], it is possible to witness the "ritualization of subordination" of some women if we deconstruct the notion of a 'global sisterhood' with assumptions of sameness

among women, and cast our sociological gaze to countries outside the Global North. In particular, while the Muslim nations of Brunei, Qatar and Saudi Arabia sent women to the London 2012 Olympics for the first time following extensive pressure from the IOC, there remain issues for Muslim Olympic women related to modesty, conflicting demands of athletic and culturally-appropriate clothing, competing in the presence of men, and different interpretations of Islamic beliefs[16]. And, in Brazil, it was 1932 before the first woman was able to represent her country at the Olympics, and not until 1996 that the first women won Olympic medals due to limited access to the necessary training resources. From the latter part of the twentieth century onwards, the feminist movement in Brazil was aligned with social movements seeking civil and political equity, and began to impact on the organisation of sport. By 2008, women constituted almost half (48%) of the Brazilian team achieving medal success in a range of Olympic sports, but with no improvement in the significant under-representation of women in leadership and management positions which remains at less than 10%[17]. Rubio[17] argues that there is a desire to maintain traditional practices in Brazilian culture, underpinned by a dominant trait of cordiality, or kindness, hospitality and generosity, in part as a legacy of Brazil's history of Portuguese colonisation and patriarchy. Goffman's[8] dramaturgical perspective helps us to see how many women in Brazil may feel pressured to present and perform a gendered self that conforms to expectations of the societal audience. This undermines women's progress in sport, particularly in leadership roles: "Brazilian women remain excluded not so much because they are women, but because of a corrupt system sustained by the unquestioned and uncritical acceptance of cordiality as a taken-for-granted attribute of social relations"[17] (p. 137).

The trends are even worse for the Paralympic Games, with women making up only 35.4% of participants at the London 2012 Games, and 55 of the 164 countries represented sent no female athletes at all. In the Sochi 2014 Winter Paralympic Games, only 30% of competitors were female. While some have argued that this is because more males than females have spinal cord injuries and/or have been injured in warfare increasing the numbers of potential participants, it also appears that female Paralympians experience stigmatisation[18] and face particular stereotypes regarding their perceived frailty[19].

In addition to the participation rates, Donnelly and Donnelly[13] (p. 24) argue that

"There are still substantial differences in terms of opportunities and in terms of the structural characteristics of the competition". They identify four main areas of structural inequality. First, they indicate that there continue to be gender-based structural and rule differences that still exist in sports at large, and on the Olympic programme, including shorter distances for women in athletics and swimming, and different equipment in sailing and shooting.

Second, there continue to be differences in funding and sponsorship between male and female athletes/teams, with British cyclists describing an "overwhelming sexism" (Lizzie Armitstead) in the sport, and that "women's racing is not of interest to main sponsors because it's not visible" (Emma Pooley). GB volleyball funded only the men's team for London 2012 even though the women's team achieved greater success, with one woman incurring debts of £10,000 to play in the Olympics. In 2014, UK Sport withdrew the funding that had been approved to support preparations for Rio 2016 for women's synchronised swimming, goalball and beach volleyball on the basis that the women failed to demonstrate realistic medal potential[20].

Third, there are differences in publicity and media representation for male and female athlete/sports: "From table tennis to boxing there have been recent drives to put female athletes into short skirts to boost audiences"[13] (Toronto Star, July 26, 2012; p. 14). While many British female athletes did receive comparable media coverage to their male counterparts, the Sports Journalist Association and National Union of Journalists state that the women were in sports that receive little media coverage outside of the Olympic Games (particularly cycling, equestrian and rowing)[20]. According to a research report by the Croatian Olympic Committee, women are under-represented in television coverage of sports and, where women are represented in commercial media, it is often in entertainment, scandals or sexual affairs. This is in spite of the fact that the IOC raised media coverage as an issue as long ago as their Centennial Congress in 1994, stating in their final report that "men's and women's performances should be given the same consideration and respect (by the media)"[21] (p. 10). More thorough analysis of these findings reinforces Goffman's[4] argument of the consequences of gendered practices for the reproduction of gender: first, the media reinforces a traditional attitude toward women, that the place of a woman is at home; and second, the mediated treatment of women reflects neoliberal values, which in the framework of

the so-called sexual economy regards a woman mainly as a "sex object"[22] (p.70).

And finally, in London 2012, we witnessed the re-emergence of sex testing for female athletes. This is part of a broader consequence of traditional gender ideology which is grounded in the binary classification model, and societal desire to magnify gender difference[4]: that women who do not look or behave in ways that meet standards of traditional femininity may be stigmatised[18], experience discrimination and, in some cases, must prove that they are women. During the Sochi 2014 Winter Olympics, several athletes were exposed to extensive media commentary regarding their appearance and use of make-up. It is also well documented that these Games highlighted, and served as a form of protest against, institutionalised homophobia in Russian under Putin's presidency, with legislation having been passed in 2013 prohibiting propaganda of non-traditional sexual practices in minors, serving as another example of traditional gender ideology and binaries regarding what is 'traditional' or 'normal' sexual practice, and what behaviour is beyond the boundaries. In the same year as the Sochi 2014 Games, there were reports that British gymnast and Olympic medallist Beth Tweddle had also suffered abuse through Twitter regarding her appearance[20]. Throughout the history of the Olympic Games, female athletes have been subject to so-called 'peek and poke parades' where they were inspected naked by (usually male) physicians to confirm that they were female, through the Barr sex test which involved taking a chromosome profile, to the female fairness test adopted prior to the London 2012 Olympics which used testosterone level as a single biological indicator of being female. The female fairness test was introduced as a response to the case of Mokgadi Caster Semenya, the South African athlete whose sex was questioned as a result of her appearance which did not match traditional Western norms of femininity, and her ability to run fast in middle distance track and field events. Each of these tests has been criticised for being scientifically flawed, discriminatory against women who do not look sufficiently feminine, as well as overlooking a whole variety of social and other factors that affect sports performance beyond hormonal variations. The IOC has now established a policy on transsexual athletes which allows transgender athletes to compete in the Olympics if they are post-operative, have had a minimum of two years of hormone therapy, and their gender reassignment is legally recognised[23]. However the Semenya case illustrates how the IOC continues to struggle with those

who are not easily labelled within a gender binary, including dealing with hyperandrogenism and transgender athletes. And, in a dramaturgical sense, many female athletes now feel a need to draw on a 'reformed apologetic' whereby they are able to express an assertive, tough athletic identity while performing their femininity through their appearance (which also makes them attractive to sponsors)[5,8,24].

This evidence suggests that, while there has been progress for Olympic women, there remain challenges which still need to be addressed. Over the last 40 years, a global women and sport movement has emphasised the benefits of sports for women and girls, informing and encouraging political action. In 1994, 280 delegates from more than 80 countries attended a conference in Brighton, UK, the discussions at which resulted in a set of global gender equity principles now known as 'The Brighton Declaration'. This has been used by individuals and groups to pressure governments and sports organisations around the world to support and create new opportunities for girls and women in sport[25]. The International Olympic Committee itself adopted the Brighton Declaration and has held a 'World Conference on Women and Sport' every four years since 1996. In 2012, the conference was held in Los Angeles, USA, and approved "the Los Angeles Declaration" that focuses on bringing more women into management and leadership roles, and increasing collaboration and partnerships to promote gender equity[11]. Most recently, in 2014, following a review of 20 years of progress from 1994-2014, a report was published by the International Working Group on Women and Sport (IWG) identifying the priority areas in need of positive action[22]. In what follows, I will highlight four areas that are particularly relevant to Olympic women and/or illustrate work being undertaken for women in sport by Olympic organisations, with an example in each area of good practice from a National Olympic Committee.

The first of the areas identified is a need to improve provision of child-care for women athletes. The need for child-care provision is mentioned in principle 2 of the Brighton Declaration, as the need to care for children can limit the time available to participate and compete in sports. In some countries, child-care provision has successfully been provided for athletes, coaches and other leaders. In the report, the American Samoa National Olympic Committee provide evidence that, when an activity involves women, they usually set up activities so that the children are taken care of at

the same time enabling women to participate fully in their sports[22].

The second issue is the lack of sufficient support for retiring female athletes. As there are more opportunities for women in many countries to do sport as a career, so there is an increased need to consider how best to support these women when they cease to participate in competitive, professional sports. The Algerian Olympic Committee (COA) recognises that most athletes' sporting career does not last beyond their mid-30s and so they have created a strategy to help women develop a career plan that combines sports competition with education. There also is a new programme to improve living conditions and adaptation to a professional working life for retired athletes, which includes helping female former players to become coaches and leaders in sport. The course is managed by the COA, the Solidarity Committee, the International Volleyball Federation (FIVB) and Algerian Volleyball Union (FAVB) [22].

The third area concerns the issue of safety for elite female athletes, including protection from injury, disordered eating, and sexual harassment and abuse. The Women and Sport Committee of the Czech Olympic Committee undertook a research project with findings indicating that 45% of the 595 participants in the study had experienced sexual harassment inside of a sport setting. The project recommended the importance of developing a policy for educating and protecting people in sport from sexual harassment. Based on the results of this project, in 2007 the IOC produced a consensus statement on Sexual Harassment, which has been followed by other new projects and programmes via an interactive on-line education tool[22].

Finally, the IWG identify a lack of women in leadership as the fifth area in need of attention. Despite the success of a 'global women's sports movement' for increased participation, women remain under-represented in coaching, management and decision-making positions on sport governing bodies. The IOC recognised in their centennial conference in 1994 that "women's accession to positions as sports leaders must be encouraged and accelerated"[21] (p. 5). A series of IOC meetings followed during which a quota system was proposed, contested, resisted, and opposed with claims that women did not want, were not interested and/or able in having a career in sports leadership (see Matthews, unpublished). However, in 1995 Juan Antonio Samaranch (the then IOC President) intervened, proposing a quota that at least 10% of seats on decision-making bodies in sport were to be held by women by 2000, increasing to 20% by 2005. The

reason for Samaranch's intervention should be understood against the backdrop of the broader social activism for women and sport at this time which had already provided the momentum for the 1994 Brighton Declaration, and as Margaret Talbot (former President of IAPESGW) stated: "I think Samaranch knew the time was now, you know, that if the IOC didn't show some kind of commitment, they would be even more criticised" (in Matthews, unpublished). However, at the most recent IOC World Conference on Women and Sport in 2012, it was acknowledged that the targets set by Samaranch are still not achieved. With regards to the organisation of the Olympics and Paralympics themselves, both the IOC and the IPC still have never had a female President, and it took until 2013 until the IOC counted as many as four women on the 15 member Executive Board.

At a national level, in 2012, UK Sport and Sport England asked all publicly funded bodies to ensure that at least 25% of their board members were female by 2017, but less than half of all funded National Governing Bodies had achieved this by 2014[20]. The Women in Sport Commission of the Croatian Olympic Committee founded the Network of Female Coordinators for Women in Sport in 2007. In late 2013, their seminar concluded that women remain under-represented in decision-making positions in sport, that this is not fully recognised as a problem, and that there is not yet specialised training for women officials. The seminar recommended that national sports federations should monitor gender representation, programmes for women should be promoted by the Croatian Olympic Committee, and that the statutes of sports organisations should provide their presidents with the possibility of co-opting female members in executive bodies so that gender equality can be achieved[22].

In 2014, following the publication of the 20-year progress report, the International Working Group on Women and Sport[11] published a legacy report including the Brighton Plus Helsinki 2014 Declaration on Women and Sport. This updates the original Brighton Declaration principles with the following aims which may also be applied to Olympic women and their supporters:

- mainstream the values and principles of equity and diversity into all international, regional, national and local strategies for sport and physical activity;
- ensure that all women and girls have opportunity to participate in sport and

physical activity in a safe and supportive environment which preserves the rights, dignity and respect of the individual;

- recognise the diversity of women's and girls' needs, especially those with disabilities through delivery of Article 30 of the 2006 UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities; and those living and working in cultures and contexts which may be hostile to female participation and performance;
- increase and support the involvement of women in sport and physical activity, at all levels and in all functions and roles;
- ensure that the knowledge, experiences and values of women contribute to the development of sport and physical activity;
- promote the recognition of women's and girls' involvement in sport and physical activity as a contribution to public life, community development and in building healthy nations;
- promote the recognition by women of the intrinsic value of sport and physical activity and its contributions to personal development and healthy lifestyles
- increase cooperation between women and men and ensure support of men in order to promote gender equality in sport and physical activity.

Sociology of sport researchers have critically analysed positive messages from 'sports evangelists' who consider and promote the values of sport to be a perfect tool for bettering overall quality of life for individuals and society alike, and for solving most personal and social problems[26,27,28]. For example, with respect to gender and women's experiences of sport, sociologists of sport have long understood that a simple binary classification of gender has traditionally limited women's involvement in sports to those that do not threaten issues of sexuality, power or gender relations, but instead conform to traditional norms of femininity. Drawing on Goffman's[4,6] argument that many societies magnify gender differences in ways that subordinate women, this paper has provided examples of the ways in which traditional gender ideology continues to affect Olympic women, examined some of the actions being undertaken within Olympic organisations, and highlighted recommendations from the International Working Group on Women and Girls which might usefully inform the ongoing social responsibility of the Olympic movement to continue to work toward full gender equity.

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