

## **THE FEMALE OLYMPIAN: TRADITION VERSUS INNOVATION IN THE QUEST FOR INCLUSION**

**Ana Miragaya  
Olympic Studies Research Group  
Universidade Gama Filho**

The Olympic Games of the modern era started officially on April 6, 1896, in Athens Greece, with the participation of 245 male athletes from 14 nations of the western world. The main proponent of the Games, Baron Pierre de Coubertin (1863-1937), a typical man of his time, chose to follow the tradition of the Ancient Games keeping women out of courts, fields and other sports arenas and revering the figure of the ancient hero with his own extraordinary physical and moral virtues. The first modern Olympics did not have any women athletes, excluding therefore 51% of humanity. However, it is possible to observe a gradual increase in the number of female Olympians from 1900 to 2000 (from 1.9% in 1900 to 38.3% in 2000 of the total number of athletes)<sup>1</sup> and a very small number of women taking up administrative and management positions in the Olympic Committees after 1981.

This Chapter aims to review and discuss the evolution of the participation of women in the modern Olympic Games: from total exclusion (0.0% participation) and passivity prescribed by traditional values and beliefs at the very beginning, in 1896, to partial inclusion (38.3% participation) pressured by innovation and a change in gender roles brought about by transformations that occurred during the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Empirical contributions will illustrate this theme, which is here primarily seen as interplay between oppositions.

The inclusion of women in the Olympics came to being done gradually by the women themselves as a result of their development and awareness of the new active role they were beginning to play in the new industrialized society of the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and during the whole 20<sup>th</sup> century. Women were conquering new positions in their countries, becoming more active, especially struggling to become full citizens with the right to vote. If women were increasingly calling for a place in the social order, it was not different in the sport sphere. Slowly women started to get into a realm that did not belong to them in the first place and they were beginning to enjoy it. They were streaming from a passive to an active position. Sport had always been a male construct in which very rarely did women take part. Traditional beliefs had always held that physical exertion and competition were contrary to a woman's nature. Besides, it was believed that the place of the woman was in the home, taking care of the house and the children, (indoors) and that the place of the man was outside the home, working as the sole breadwinner of the family (outdoors)<sup>2</sup>.

The history of the inclusion of women in sport is identified by some researchers<sup>3, 4, 5</sup> not only as a history of power and male domination over women but also as a history of inequalities where women always played roles of submission, not being allowed to search for respect and equality. Other researchers have qualified it as a product of European and North

American colonialism, a mirror of the games of these regions and not representative of indigenous peoples of the rest of the world <sup>6</sup>. It was a history based on tradition where changes and innovation played a very minor role. However, with the advancements of society itself in face of new technology and information, women began to realize that their history had to be retaken from another perspective: that of innovation, participation, activity and inclusion. The situation of women in the Olympic Games evolved then from total exclusion at the very beginning, in 1896, to some inclusion along the years. Women's advancement and awareness of their new positioning pressured society to come to a point where the next quest was not whether women should participate but how women should participate. In what sports and events and in what other positions, including as officials in international and national Olympic bodies, were women to participate actively. The 'permission' and the extension of this participation are still being prescribed by the International Olympic Committee (IOC) members, the majority of whom are men.

### **The Tradition of Ancient Olympic Games**

Back in Greek times, at the root of all western tradition, Athenians believed that women should be covered up and not seen; therefore, they were not allowed to take part in athletic competitions because they would have to expose themselves. Moreover, female bodies were to be conditioned for childbirth. At the same time, the Games of the Goddess Hera, whose first records date back to 200 B.C., were games that included young, adolescent, and unmarried women athletes in competitions held every four years <sup>7</sup>.

The first recorded information of the Ancient Olympic Games dates back to 776 B.C. They were actually religious festivals in which competitive sports were believed to entertain the spirits of the dead. Therefore, a period of peace was supposed to happen during the Games. The tribes and cities constantly at war with one another welcomed the month of truce every four years for the Olympics. It was a welcome recess for everyone, especially because it was thought to please the gods. Although only men were allowed to take part in the competitions that were held in honor of Zeus, certain women were allowed to watch the Games. These were young unmarried women in search of a husband. They were there to watch the beautiful bodies and talk with their brothers or father about the one man each wanted as their mate. However, married women were prohibited from attending the Olympics on penalty of death. The only married woman allowed to watch the games was the Priestess of Demeter <sup>8</sup>.

Women, who had been prizes to the winners in the chariot races, were allowed to participate indirectly as unofficial competitors in the Olympic Games some centuries later in the condition of horse owners. For instance, the Spartan princess Kyniska entered her horse in the chariot race in 392 B.C. and won it. It is interesting to observe that the first women athletes came from Sparta especially because Spartans believed that fit and healthy women that exercised regularly would have healthy children. At first this could seem a radically

different thought than that held by the Athenians, who preferred their women covered up and left to their own passive household routines <sup>8</sup>. Actually the Spartans were putting physical activity to the service of women's old function of procreation. Women did not play any role model of heroines in the condition of being active and athletes. Women's participation was considered unimportant especially because the ancient Greeks were highly competitive and believed strongly in the nexus of 'agon' or competition for excellence.

The ultimate Greek goal was to be the best by means of comparative conducts and celebrations. All aspects of life, especially athletics, were centered on this cultural belief. They valued physical strength, agility, speed, and other physical qualities believed to be inherent to men only. Because Olympic champions were considered victors, they enjoyed great honors and were entitled to receive several privileges such as (i) being given a crown made from olive leaves (the 'cotinus'); (ii) having statues made of themselves placed at Olympia; (iii) having all their meals paid for at the public's expense; (iv) getting front-row seats at theaters and (v) occupying high offices. Furthermore, because they were believed to bring their cities into favor with the Greek gods, their compatriots pulled down part of the walls of their original cities for them to enter upon their return. The culture of the victor developed into the culture of the male hero, which has been carried on throughout the times from the tradition of the past to the inherited tradition of today's society <sup>7,8</sup>.

On the other hand, women were valued for the quality of children they produced; therefore, they could not compete or participate in similar physical activities or competitions as they had been thought of for being very delicate. Women were not heroines because they did not fulfill the same pre-requisites of Olympic heroes related to size, physical strength, abilities and skills. On the contrary, seen as weak individuals, women were supposed to stay at home, leading a very passive life. This belief had been cultivated throughout the centuries and still existed when the Olympic Games were revived by Coubertin. It was then gradually modified as science evolved to prove that women could follow the same paths men did and still have children

The Ancient Olympic Games lasted for almost 12 centuries, being abolished only in 394 A.D. by the Christian Emperor Theodosius II not only because of the bitterness of the relations between Greeks and Romans or the brutality and corruption that reigned during the Games but also because he believed that the festivals were pagan. Some years later, the Stadium of Olympia, where those events were held, was razed and the Olympic fields pulled down <sup>8</sup>.

### **The Revival of the Games: Tradition Maintained**

During centuries the places where the competitions were held continued to be empty and prey to floods, earthquakes and thieves. It is possible to say that athletic celebrations disappeared almost entirely for more than a thousand years until some enthusiasts of the Ancient Olympic Games considered reviving them for the first time around 1793, but they

were unsuccessful. There seemed to be little funding and international coordination to back it up. Then, in 1881, Ernst Curtius, a German archaeologist, directing a research group, uncovered the ruins of the Stadium of Olympia.

Inspired by the German discovery, Baron Pierre de Coubertin took a personal interest in the archaeological site and especially in the celebration that it evoked due to French educational and nationalistic claims. His vague proposal for an international sports festival and competition was initially greeted by blank stares, but in his capacity as general secretary of the Union of French Societies of Athletic Sports, he visited colleges, universities, and private sports clubs, talking to anyone who would listen. Then in 1894, speaking at the Sorbonne in Paris to a gathering of representatives from nine nations--including the United States and Russia--he argued for and proposed that the Ancient Games be revived on an international scale. With his hearers' approval, he formed the IOC to organize the Olympic Games and make the rules <sup>9</sup>.

Following tradition, the IOC declared that all competing athletes had to be amateurs, not professionals and decided to hold the first modern Olympic Games in Athens, the original home of that celebration. Money was raised with personal and public donations and the sale of eight different Olympic postage stamps. However, with the same enthusiasm that he hailed the archaeological finding in Greece and with the same energy that he pushed the revival of the Olympic Games, Pierre de Coubertin completely kept his coherence with the old Greek tradition when he excluded the women from the Games. He was completely against the practice of sports and physical activities by women as most men of his times. According to him, women only had the function of bearing children: "a woman's glory would come through the number and quality of children she produced. As far as sports were concerned women's role was to encourage their sons to excel. She was not to seek records for herself ". The Games were "the solemn periodic manifestation of male sport based on internationalism, on loyalty as a means, on arts as a background and the applause of women as a recompense" <sup>3</sup>. As Lunzenfichter<sup>10</sup> reports, Coubertin still claimed that a "female Olympiad would be impractical, uninteresting, unaesthetic and incorrect" just after receiving the support of Pope Pius XI, who had seriously condemned the playing of sport by women.

By ruling women out and still keeping traditional values of other people from another era, it is possible that Coubertin fired up the ancient Olympic spirit of the male hero, which has inspired athletes around the world along decades. It is important to observe that the figure of the male hero was rescued with the revival of the Games and at the expense of the exclusion of the women. There was no rescue of the figure of the heroine once it did not exist in the Ancient Olympic Games. Neither did Coubertin want to develop the new role model of the heroine. The only role model that was reconstructed was that of the male hero.

### **The Response of the Women: the Olympian female in the very first Olympic Games**

In spite of Coubertin's efforts to keep women out of the competitions, there was an unofficial competitor in the 1896 marathon, a poor Greek woman who became known as 'Melpomene', whose real name was Stamati Revithi. She was not allowed to compete in the men's race, but ran by herself the next day. The final lap was completed outside the stadium as she had her entry denied. After her marathon run, athletics officials could not remember her name so they labeled her 'Melpomene', who is the Greek muse of Tragedy. Looking at Stamati Revithi, they could see only tragedy, not her extraordinary feat <sup>11</sup>. She had finished less than two hours after the winner (in four and a half hours) and had beaten some of her male competitors <sup>3</sup>. She was the first innovator to face the barriers of tradition.

The first modern Olympic Games took place at the very end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, at a time when the western world was harvesting years of new inventions, hard work and technology that would change the face of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Industrialization and social reform were essential in determining which direction the richest countries such as the United States and European nations would take from then on. With the evolution of technology and new inventions being added to the industries that started to flourish, more labor had been necessary to move the different economies ahead. Women had already started gradually to work outside their home and join the labor force; therefore, they were taking on new roles. As they began to participate more in the economy of their countries, they wanted to be heard as citizens. They also wanted to vote. Many women organizations were founded to strive for citizenship. Slowly women were going from a passive to an active position. The end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and especially the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century saw the changes that also motivated women's actions in sports.

Although the International Olympic Committee, founded in 1894 in Paris, regulated over the Olympic activities, National Olympic Committees (NOCs) had to be created in the different nations that wanted to participate in the Games. In the very beginning, the local national committees were the ones that organized the Games in their host sites. The Games of 1900 and 1904 were connected with World Fairs; therefore, the selection of events to be included in the Olympic program was mainly in the hands of the fairs' organizing committees and thus to a large extent beyond the control of the IOC <sup>12</sup>. In fact the Olympics were slow to catch on. The following Games held in Paris in 1900, in Saint Louis in 1904 and in London in 1908 were sparsely attended and badly organized. That made the inclusion of women in these Games a little less difficult. However, since the admission of women to these Games did not have the official consent of the IOC, they did not have their status recognized. As a result, women competitors were awarded diplomas instead of medals and olive branches <sup>5</sup>, which were supposed to only go to the male heroes. The role model of the female Olympian was still to be constructed.

Golf and tennis, elite sports, were open to women in the Olympic Games of 1900 in Paris: 12 women from five countries participated in these two sports or disciplines, in a total of three events. The Olympic Games of 1904 in Saint Louis only had six female Olympians,

all American, who participated in archery because the other international female athletes did not have the financial conditions to buy their way across the ocean to participate in the Games. Women's gymnastics was demonstrated but was not considered to be an official event.

The Olympic Games of 1908 in London had 36 women competing in four sports: tennis, sailing, ice-skating and archery, all of which sports of high social prestige. The participation of women was beginning to grow. Although the Olympics of 1912 in Stockholm had 55 women athletes (2.2% of all competitors) from 11 countries participating in six events of two sports, including swimming, women's sports remained a marginal phenomenon and were still not officially recognized by the IOC. According to Pfister <sup>12</sup>, it was the 'feminist' Swedes who introduced the swimming competitions in the Olympics, the first battle of female Olympians for meters and seconds. Swimming was a very popular sport at that time and considerably contributed to the participation of a greater number of women in the Games.

It is important to mention that financing has always been an important factor for the participation of women in the Games. Not all women have the credibility and the support they need from the local committees or from sponsors; therefore, it becomes very hard for many women athletes to travel on their own to the places of competition. Most of them do not work and when they do work, their remuneration tends to be lower than men's pay. Male athletes, on the other hand, have more credibility because of tradition; as a result, it is easier for them to be offered more opportunities. Besides, their income tends to be higher than that of women, which permits them to make up for traveling investments. The number of women athletes started to increase as it can be seen in Table 1.

<b>Year</b>	<b>Sports</b>	<b>Events</b>	<b>Countries</b>	<b>Participants</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Sports</b>	<b>Events</b>	<b>Countries</b>	<b>Participants</b>
<b>1896</b>	-	-	-	-	<b>1956</b>	6	26	39	384
<b>1900</b>	2	3	5	12	<b>1960</b>	6	29	45	610
<b>1904</b>	1	2	1	6	<b>1964</b>	7	33	53	683
<b>1908</b>	2	3	4	36	<b>1968</b>	7	39	54	781

<b>1912</b>	2	6	11	57	<b>1972</b>	8	43	65	1058
<b>1920</b>	2	6	13	77	<b>1976</b>	11	49	66	1247
<b>1924</b>	3	11	20	136	<b>1980</b>	12	50	54	1125
<b>1928</b>	4	14	25	290	<b>1984</b>	14	62	94	1567
<b>1932</b>	3	14	18	127	<b>1988</b>	17	86	117	2186
<b>1936</b>	4	15	26	328	<b>1992</b>	19	98	136	2708
<b>1948</b>	5	19	33	385	<b>1996</b>	21	108	169	3626
<b>1952</b>	6	25	41	518	<b>2000</b>	25	300	199	4069

## **The Inclusion of Women: Different Periods, Different Readings**

### **a. From 1896 to 1928**

Hargreaves <sup>4</sup> identifies three periods of women's participation in the modern Olympic Games: (1) from 1896 to 1928; (2) from 1928 to 1952 and (3) from 1952 to today.

The first period is characterized by a tradition of exclusion and some efforts to resist these practices. It was also the time when women were searching for jobs, getting access to education, fighting to have the right to vote and trying to get adjusted to constant changes of the new society that required new gender roles. This period includes the twenties, when, according to Théberge <sup>5</sup>, there was some struggle over the control of women's international sport and the form and definition of women's participation. As progress pushed the industrialized countries ahead it also went for a change in women's international sport. Since the IOC refused to include women's athletics (American track and field) in the Olympic Games, the Frenchwoman Alice de Milliat defied the status quo, founded the Fédération Sportive Féminine Internationale (FSFI) and organized the first Women's Olympics in 1922. They were so successful that the Games were held again in 1926, 1930 and 1934 as the Women's World Games. They became visible to the IOC especially because of the public interest women sports received. The Women's Games were so successful that they not only pressured the IOC to eventually incorporate them permanently to the Olympic Games after extensive negotiations and maneuvers <sup>13</sup> but also influenced Women's Games in Brazil in 1933 <sup>14</sup> and in 1949 <sup>15</sup>.

Women were beginning to win their battles for inclusion. This can be observed in Coubertin's words when he left the IOC presidency in 1925: "I remain hostile to the participation of women in the Games. They have been admitted to a growing number of events against my wishes" <sup>10</sup>.

It was still during the period 1896-1928 that two main debates about women's involvement in sport came up. They would influence the view over women's sport and women's participation in the Olympics for a long time. The first one, still based on tradition

and then related to the poor and limited medical wisdom of the time, with no evidence that could prove it, promoted beliefs in women's natural frailty and condemned vigorous physical activity as dangerous to women's health and well being. As a result, along the editions of the Games, women's participation in athletics and other sports was done on a limited basis according to a model of what was considered the ideal of female frailty prescribed by male doctors. As winds of the past were still blowing, women were excluded from the strength events in athletics and only gradually were women's team events introduced into the Games.

The second debate was about the control of women's sport, which was new to society and to the women themselves. According to tradition, the active positions of command should belong to men and not to women, who were supposed to obey and be passive. Struggles were waged over who would control women's national and international sport and what would be the form and definition of women's participation. To follow tradition, women continued to have no control of their own participation in national or international sport.

Summing up, it is possible to say that the events of the 1920s and then of the 1930s had two essential meanings which were both cultural and social: (1) definition and meaning of women's sports based on biological differences and (2) the control of the organization of women's sports as an Olympic male dominant function.

#### **b. From 1928 to 1952**

The two meanings above were carried on throughout the second phase. Hargreaves<sup>4</sup> identified the period between 1928 and 1952 as one of consolidation and struggle. It was exactly during this period that women fought to be seen and to consolidate their position as sportswomen. This was a new concept not only to women but to society as a whole. Women were in a very complex situation that demanded the development of role models for women who practiced sports and that went to the Olympic Games. Their only role models had been male heroes. They were then in a crossroads which pointed to two different directions. They were either to follow previously established models or to construct new female role models from scratch. Due to the limited basis of access to Olympic sports that had been set by the IOC in 1928, women seemed to have chosen the first alternative.

Even though women had taken another little step, they wanted to guarantee their role as active participants in sport and in society. This positioning was strengthened during the 40s as women had be mobilized to take up posts left by men who had to go to the battlefields in Europe. As a result of the World War II, there were no Olympic Games in 1940 or 1944. The massive direct and indirect participation and more inclusion of women in the economy of their countries at war greatly contributed for women's new positioning in their society and their awareness of the place they occupied.

During this time, the model of women's sport based on biological differences between the sexes which had been constructed in the thirties was also taken to school sport programs and ended up limiting the way women looked at their own athleticism. At the end



of this period, female participation in the Olympic Games became a fact, but the gains women had made were conservative because the model of women's sport that had been adopted conformed to the ideal of feminine athleticism and its cultural significance was still to reinforce the myth of female frailty<sup>5</sup>. It is then possible to observe society's maintenance of women's traditional functions.

### **c. After 1952**

However, according to Hargreaves<sup>4</sup>, 1952 starts a period of challenge to male and masculine hegemony in Olympic sport especially because of two events. This fact did not mean that gender relations would be reconstructed to make up for past inequalities. It meant rather that women found other ways to fight exclusion, tradition, passivity, and the chores imposed by society to then try to reach their objectives of inclusion, innovation, activity, and design of new roles in the fast changing world. Let us, then, analyze the recent past and the changes detected in the 2000 Olympiad.

#### **( i ) Two events**

The first event was the entry of the Soviet Union and other countries of the east bloc as new participants in the expansion of the Games that took place in Helsinki, Finland, in this post World War II era. These countries were gender blind. They had culturally different traditions as well as objectives. They had included women their own way a long time ago. Since they placed a premium on athletic success with little attention to the gender of the winners, they had made a large material and social investment on the training of their athletes for the Games. As a result, the number of participating women athletes went from 385 in 1948 to 518 in 1952 (see Table 1) and the new women athletes became visible because they had had training for that. It was part of their education in schools and colleges<sup>16</sup>. The number of medals was the most important thing for them. Table 2 shows the number of medals the U.S.S.R. got from 1912 to 1960. Even when the countries that made up the former U.S.S.R. started competing individually in the Olympic Games, the number of medals was still more important than the gender of the athletes who earned them, as seen in Table 3.

Whenever an athlete regardless of gender was a gold winner, the national anthem of his or her country was played and the flag was raised, making that visible to the world<sup>6</sup>. It was already the Cold War. The number of medals meant how many times these countries were honored with victories. Once the eastern world had discovered a new way of becoming visible and of making political propaganda, the western countries were forced out of concern for their own Olympic standing to pay greater attention to the participation and performance of women and to invest on their training and preparation. Women benefited from the situation, became innovators, and started increasing their participation numbers.

**Table 2: Medals won by the U.S.S.R. in Olympic Games <sup>16</sup>**

Year	Location	Medals				Classification
		Gold	Silver	Bronze	TOTAL	
1912	Stockholm	0	2	3	5	16
1952	Helsinki	22	30	19	71	2
1956	Melbourne	37	29	32	98	1
1960	Rome	43	29	31	103	1

Obs. The U.S.S.R. did not participate in the Olympic Games of 1920, 1924, 1928, 1932, 1936 and 1948.

**Table 3: Medals won by countries of the former U.S.S.R. in the Olympic Games, Sydney 2000 <sup>16</sup>**

Country	Number of medals				Classification
	Gold	Silver	Bronze	TOTAL	
Countries of the former U.S.S.R.	48	48	67	163	1
U.S.A.	39	25	33	97	2
Russia	32	28	28	88	3

The second event took place in the 1960s: the women's movement in North America and Europe as a consequence of scientific and technological development not only because of the need for more accurate training and specialized nutrition but also because of the invention of the birth-control pill, which helped women fight traditional approaches, control their own sexual life, and plan their families. The new roles played by women during and after the World War II added to the science advances and produced a re-thinking of women's position in society and a challenge to traditional ideas about gender roles. As a result of this new positioning, it was possible to observe an increase in the participation of the women in sports and soon enough concern with gender inequality in sport gained prominence.

## ( ii ) The Sydney Games

There has been a steady increase in the number of female Olympians. It might seem that women have achieved positions of equality in relation to representation in terms of numbers. The 2000 Games women athletes (4,069) were 38.3% of the total number of athletes (10,651) <sup>1</sup>. If the objective is to reach 52.0% as proposed by Lucas <sup>17</sup>, there is still a long way ahead.

It is also important to look at the different types of events that have been added to the Games in recent years. They show that there still is some sort of ambivalence about the meaning of women's sport. On the one hand, events such as women's distance events (marathon and 10000-meter race), multiple events that combine running, jumping, and throwing competitions and team sports (volleyball, basketball, field hockey) have been added in recent years, challenging the myth of female frailty, but still following the traditional model of the male hero. On the other hand, sports such as synchronized swimming, rhythmic gymnastics and artistic gymnastics, which emphasize traditionally feminine desirable qualities and characteristics, maintaining the myth of female frailty have been included. There are no male Olympians in these disciplines as they reinforce the supposed traditional feminine qualities. As a result, the public gets an ambiguous message. At the same time that Olympic sports and events emphasize the performances of the female Olympian as a product of remarkable skill and ability, they also provide symbolic confirmation of the special nature of women's sport due to their emphasis on beauty, form, and appearance <sup>5</sup>.

This tendency is reflected in some countries. In Taiwan, for instance, women athletes as role models prove that feminine grace, intelligence, focus, power and perseverance blend perfectly together to achieve brawn, brain and beauty. In Hungary, at the same time women participated in competitions and in the "women's sport day", they received beautician advice and could test the latest beauty products <sup>16</sup>. In Korea, all they need is for men to have a powerful physique and well-developed muscle and, for women, a slender and glamorous figure <sup>16</sup>.

Although women have come a long way from the exclusion due to tradition and to partial inclusion because of innovation, they have come short of their objectives to reach equality in spite of their differences. They are still striving to be respected and to have equal footing by being biologically different. Women are still under-represented and have fewer opportunities as far as the Olympic Games are concerned. In the Sydney Olympics, although there were nine countries that sent teams with no women athletes and 42 countries that sent teams with just one woman, 13 small delegations had more female than male Olympians and 36 countries sent the same number of female and male athletes (Table 4), but no country sent only women. All of the 199 nations and the athletes of Oriental Timor had male athletes.

**Table 4: Olympian females in the 27<sup>th</sup> Olympics in Sydney, 2000<sup>9</sup>**

	<b>No female athletes</b>	<b>Same number of male and female athletes</b>	<b>One woman athlete</b>	<b>More female than male athletes</b>
<b>Africa</b>	2	14	19	3
<b>America</b>	1	6	7	3
<b>Asia</b>	6	10	7	4
<b>Europe</b>	0	3	3	1
<b>Oceania</b>	0	3	6	2
<b>Total</b>	9	36	42	13

This still under-representation of women seen in the Sydney Games (6,582 males and 4,069 female Olympians) can also be observed in the fact that countries tend to invest on the preparation of the female Olympians only at the disciplines that will be up for competition during the Games, leaving out possibilities of new sports and new disciplines<sup>6</sup>. This can be reflected in the society and in the daily habits of the population of those countries. As the different nations and cultures increase the number of sports open to women, there will be more women engaged in a variety of sports and disciplines, and more disciplines will then become available to women worldwide.

### **Women in administrative positions**

Women are also under-represented in the administration of Olympic affairs. The first women were appointed to the IOC only in 1981. Currently the IOC includes five women and 89 men. Similar patterns hold on the NOCs<sup>11, 5</sup>. Still due to traditional beliefs that women should have a very low profile, should play a role of passivity and submission, and should not share positions of power with men, women very seldom occupy leadership positions in their workplaces and in the political lives of their countries. As a result, there tends to be fewer women in administrative positions, especially when these positions are related to power.

However, it is important to point out that some countries have been trying to adopt different policies in relation to admitting women to positions of command. As an example, in 1998, the Taiwan's NOC was reorganized with an increased number of female members to meet the IOC regulation by the end of December of 2000. At least ten percent of positions in the NOC decision-making structures have been reserved for women in order to allow them to

make a sufficient contribution to the evolution of sport and the Olympic movement. In addition, this NOC sends women delegates at every opportunity to take part in the IOC-endorsed international conferences and seminars for the development of sports for women with a view to enriching our experience in developing the role of women in sport fields <sup>16</sup>.

According to Schneider <sup>18</sup> and following the parallel she drew between women in Plato's Republic and women in the Olympics, women have moved in to the position of warriors or athletes and are now trying to become guardians or rulers.

As Schneider <sup>18</sup> explains it, even being aware of the biological differences between men and women, Plato proposed that both men and women can and should follow the same range of occupations and perform the same functions. "What is then required as much for men as it is for women is an education that fosters aptitudes and encourages all people to strive for excellence. If women are to be guardians they must be educated as guardians – in exactly the same way as men. This is the environment we currently lack. While women often have the natural aptitude to pursue excellence in sports and politics (men's world), they are often denied access to education and models they need to see their dreams can become real. It is clear that for Plato, to not have women guardians or administrators, and to not have women warriors or athletes, is harmful to us as human beings and is therefore shameful" <sup>18</sup>.

With the technology that has been developed in these last decades, people around the world tend to have access to information through the availability of mass media. As athletes tend to be more visible than administrators, it may be hard for societies, especially women in many countries, to realize that it is possible for a woman to become a ruler in sports as well. This is one more argument to reinforce Plato's theory of education, which emphasizes that for society to get the most from both men and women, it should offer the same education to enable them to perform the same functions. Therefore, new role models for women will then be constructed, adapted to the reality of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, enabling women to get to the crossroads and empowering them to choose the road not taken.

### **Women in Sport for All**

The number of women who participate in the Olympic Games can also be explained by the number of women who practice some sport and the kind of sport they practice in the five continents <sup>16</sup>. The following approach exposes empirical contribution to the debate on account of an international comparative research developed by Lamartine DaCosta and I involving 36 countries.

The very recent book *Worldwide Experiences and Trends in Sport for All* <sup>16</sup> is the final result of this cross-national study, which displays data related to countries that privilege women in sport activities (Table 5) and offer programs that encourage sports practice through NOCs (Table 6).

**Table 5: Number of countries in SFA that privilege women<sup>18</sup>**

<b>Continents and Total number of countries</b>	<b>Countries with sports programs for women</b>	<b>Countries with no sports for women</b>	<b>Number of countries that do not even mention women</b>
<b>Asia (8)</b>	6	1	1
<b>Africa (2)</b>	1	-	1
<b>Europe (17)</b>	12	2	2
<b>Latin America (7)</b>	-	2	5
<b>North America (2)</b>	2	-	-
<b>Total</b>	21	5	9

The data above clearly shows that from the 36 countries that took part in the research project, more than half (21=58%) offer programs of sports for women, while 5 nations mention women and 9 countries do not offer programs for women (Table 5). Some countries have contributed with specific data such as Spain (Table 6) and Denmark (Table 7)

**Table 6: % of Sport Participation in Spain: 1968 - 1995<sup>16</sup>**

<b>Years</b>		<b>1968</b>	<b>1974</b>	<b>1980</b>	<b>1985</b>	<b>1990</b>	<b>1995</b>
Total	%	12.3	17.7	25	34	35	39
Sex	Men	18.3	22.7	33	46	42	48
	Women	6.8	12.8	17	23	26	32

**Table 7: Proportion of Danish population (age 16-74) actively involved in sport or exercise (%) in 1964, 1975, 1987, 1993 and 1998<sup>16</sup>.**

	1964	1975	1987	1993	1998
All	15	29	42	47	51
Men	21	31	43	47	51
<b>Women</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>51</b>
16-19	53	52	61	67	67
20-29	27	41	48	56	59
30-39	17	41	46	49	51
40-49	10	25	44	49	51
50-59	5	21	31	42	46
60-69	3	11	30	36	47
70-74	2	13	24	30	37

Other countries that support sports for women are (1) Hungary, with the first “women’s sport day” organized in 1997; (2) Singapore, with the annual National Sports Carnival for Women, the International Folk and Recreation Dance Night, and the first ever Women and Sport Conference in March 1999 to discuss issues pertaining to women and sports; (3) Israel, where there are very successful walking events exclusively for women; (4) Australia, where nearly 60% of women between 18 and 54 years of age now engage in some form of regular physical activity; and (5) France, which developed the French Federation of Physical Education and Voluntary Gymnastics (FFEPGV), mostly managed in national scope and locally developed by women, successfully reaching the number of 5 million participants, bringing the French Sport for All to the desired approach of the Council of Europe <sup>16</sup>.

Significantly enough, the continents that sent the most women to the 2000 Olympics in terms of proportions were Oceania (44.96%), Asia (40.26%) and Europe (36.96%).

The number of women involved in sports also depends directly on the incentive each country gives to the preparation of athletes to the Olympic Games. It is possible to observe the influence of NOCs in the SFA initiative. Table 8 displays information related to the nations that encourage participation in SFA via Olympic Games. 16 out of the 36 countries that participated in the project Worldwide Experiences and Trends in SFA <sup>16</sup> promote and encourage participation in the Olympic movement through SFA.

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**Table 8: Number of countries that encourage Sport for All through Olympism <sup>16</sup>**

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<b>Continents and Total number of countries</b>	<b>Countries with Olympic incentives</b>	<b>Countries with some work done by the NOCs</b>	<b>Countries with no Olympic activity</b>
<b>Asia (8)</b>	4	1	4
<b>Africa (2)</b>	-	1	1
<b>Europe (17)</b>	8	4	5
<b>Latin America (7)</b>	2	2	3
<b>North America (2)</b>	2	-	-
<b>Total</b>	16	8	13

Countries such as Belgium, Finland, Mexico, Spain, Germany, Taiwan, France and Korea have had several initiatives to promote Olympism through SFA <sup>16</sup>. The Belgian Olympic Committee (BOIC) also adopted the Sport for All philosophy. Based on Olympic ideas and values, it promoted SFA in a strange mixture of principles and aims we refer to as 'Allympism': the combination of Sport for All and Olympism, the two major but contrasting sport ideologies, performance and excellence on the one hand and participation and inclusion on the other, trying to capitalize on each other's success, thereby creating the mixed concept of 'Allympism' <sup>16</sup>.

Another example is Taiwan, whose Olympic Committee has been placing equal emphasis on Sport for All in its role as a National Olympic Committee (NOC) to promote people's good health and physical fitness. The Chinese Taipei Olympic Committee (CTOC) by taking the advantage of its publication, Olympic Quarterly, arouses women's interest in participating in Sport for All activities and encourages the civilian organizations to organize more sport activities for women <sup>16</sup>.



In the case of France, it was only in 1972, under the influence of the programs that had been set up by the Scandinavian countries, that the French National Olympic and Sporting Committee (CNOSF) decided for the establishment of the first Sport for All program, initiated by Martin Grünenwald, a physical education teacher<sup>16</sup>.

In Korea, the 88 Seoul Olympics Organizing Committee originated the Seoul Olympic Sports Promotion Foundation, which has implemented many projects to develop and publicize Sport for All programs, sponsored the National Council of Sport for All, and developed programs to promote national fitness <sup>16</sup>.

When top sport is connected with SFA, it is usually for the purpose of recruiting future top sport talent, spectators or recreational participants. For example, the U.S. National Olympic Committee is totally focused on top sport and on Sport for All activities that attract young talent. Organizations associated with the U.S. Olympic Committee do have sport programs for more general populations <sup>16</sup>.

At the same time that the social limitations of women in their original countries and the roles they play in their societies, very much based on traditions and ancient beliefs of exclusion and complete separated and pre-defined tasks, block their access to sports and physical activities in general, this exclusion also contributes to the creation of some ideal of the female Olympian of the future. This virtual image has become clearer for women every four years as the media make female Olympians visible and encourage young girls and women to develop role model figures in sports and to fight for some sports ideal. Technology, and especially, television have made this possible for women around the world. The tradition of exclusion is becoming the innovation of inclusion in a variety of sports.

Summing up, the more encouragement women have from national and international programs related or not related to the practices of the IOC and the NOCs through availability of resources, political incentives, women-friendly policies and strong examples of leadership, the more girls and women will feel compelled to adhere to sports and to Olympic sports. As a result, the levels of participation will rise and probably reach the so much desired 52%.

## **The Future**

While biological and physiological contexts can offer conditions to better interpret the differences between the sexes, adding more sports and events to women athletes' agendas,

cultural and social contexts continue to show the differences and inequalities between the genders.

It is questionable that Britain, Germany, Australia, the United States, and Russia increase their numbers of women representatives without, at the same time, Central and South America, Africa and all Islamic nations also sending female athletes. As the world of sport reflects society, it may take some more time before Islamic societies, economically underdeveloped areas of the world, and a certain small number of countries in which the Catholic Church has traditionally compartmentalized boys and girls to play out very specific roles open up space for equality in sports and positions linked to sports. Ancient culture and customs must be respected; deep-rooted beliefs cannot be disregarded. Tradition in the sense of exclusion should be re-analyzed by the different leaderships to be dealt with differently. It is essential to consider that sport is a birthright as it belongs to all human beings, men and women, boys and girls. Biological differences have to be respected for human kind to achieve social equality, especially in sport. Physical activity and sports are part of human rights and should be included in all practices.

The elusive goal of Olympic leadership is for women from every country to participate in the Olympic Games as athletes, coaches and administrators and also as representative offices in the NOCs, in the sport federations, and in the IOC. Increasing the number of female administrators in the worldwide movement is an even challenging task as each nation moves at its own speed toward equal opportunities for both sexes according to each individual context. Somehow more talented women must find their way into local, national, and international administrative sporting positions and, exactly as men do, over time, move up the ladder.

According to Schneider <sup>18</sup>, "any organization that claims human development as one of its principal goals must support the full representation of women at all levels of the organization. To deny women our proper place – alongside men as equals and partners is wrong and shameful".

New policies of encouragement for sportswomen will have a very positive impact on the profile of the female Olympian and her role model in society. For the first time women in the sports areas will be able to make their choices at the crossroads. They will either choose and follow the male hero pathways or develop their own female constructs as a heroines and leaders regardless of their position in the world of sports as sportswomen, administrators, managers, NOCs officers, IOC members or even IOC president. They will be aware of that they also have the right to sport and physical activity and will feel empowered to take any of the roads.

## **Conclusion**

Looking back to 1896, it is possible to observe that women have progressed a lot in their challenges and struggles. They fought very bravely to enter men's sphere and have

succeeded in many aspects. They have conquered their citizenship and their inclusion in the Olympic Games but have not yet reached equality in terms of numbers. Have they become heroes, heroines or mediators <sup>19</sup>? Have they achieved the position of equilibrium yet?

It would have been unthinkable a few years ago that women would compete in the marathon and the 10000-meter race or play basketball with the skill, dedication and power of women Olympians of the 2000s. At the same time, it would be very hard to imagine that women would sit on the IOC or head a National Olympic Committee although the extent of change in the administrative and organizational levels has not been so dramatic as among participants. There are still some barriers to overcome, the most crucial of which is to share the power with the male figures that represent the traditions of sport. Women have questioned traditional roles and become more aware of their place in the third millennium. They have come a long way to thinking of their biological differences as part of themselves that would allow them to compete in their own terms but having the same opportunities as men.

It is important to mention that the innovation brought about by the inclusion of women in the modern Olympic Games pressured science and technology for research and new discoveries that have shown that women can in fact do more than they had thought they could: not only in terms of those athletes who participate in the Olympics but also for the common women in terms of exercising and taking up any kind of physical activity to practice. The pressure women have made to have the right to participate in the Olympics as human beings has greatly contributed for the right women have now to participate in sports and physical activity.

More female role models would be needed to provide encouragement for girls in sport, and this means there will be the role models in all domains: in the family and school, high-level coaching, Olympic committees, government officials concerned with sport, athletics and so on.

The female Olympian is a model. The future challenges become clearer because they will contrast against this model. It is necessary to consolidate equality of rights and differences in the practices and education for all seems to be the only way out. Women will then feel they have the same rights and will know which road to take. Will this stance represent a significant example of how to search a balanced conflict-resolution when dealing with oppositions in the Olympic Movement?

## **NOTES**

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19. see Tavares, O. (2002). The Olympic Athlete: Hero or Mediator, chapter 12.5