

Patriarchy in History and Sport History: Then and Now

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The focus of this paper was to examine the impact of patriarchy in studying women's sport in the ancient world, and more especially, the Greek world. When women have been studied, they have more often than not been viewed through the eyes of patriarchy: in the ancient world and today.

Two roots of patriarchy are found in the Book of Genesis and Greek dualistic thought. Control of women's sexuality from abortion to adultery is a keystone of patriarchal power. The weapons of patriarchy are ridicule, dismissal, violence, homophobia and misogyny. The process by which patriarchy replaced matrilineal societies occurred from ca. 3100 B.C.-600 B.C. During this time, Indo-Europeans brought their gods with them as they swept down through Greece, Mesopotamia and Egypt. Patriarchy was an assault on the goddess religions and matrilineal clan societies.

Examples of the patriarchal perspective from the ancient world and contemporary historical writings include: 1) the alteration of myths by Homer to conform to the victorious patriarchal Olympians 2) the viewing of Spartan women's independence as a function of men's preoccupation in the military; and the vigorous physical activities of Spartan girls for eugenic purposes. On the contrary, Sparta was a sex-gender egalitarian society: women had real power in their own right, and girls were valued in their own right. 3) the assumption that the Herean Games were auxiliary to the Games of Zeus. Not only was the Herean festival much older than the Olympic Games, but this assumption ignores the significance of the Elean women who, owing to their stature, settled disputes and initiated girls into the secrets of their femaleness and future roles as clanswomen. 4) Many of the papers at the NASSH conference have titles which imply that they are inclusive: they are not.

The ideological hegemony of sport as a male institution invalidates the athletic experience for females. As long as patriarchy remains intact, women's sport will be denigrated because it is women who are doing sport. As long as historians continue to view the world through patriarchy, their views will be circumscribed: not only will they see women's sport in a distorted way, they will not see men in their own relation to patriarchy. If the purpose of history is to recreate social reality, then the half can never be construed to be the whole.