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## ***Symbolic Body Practices:*** **Gender Configurations in the Early Olympic Games**

It is commonly accepted in historical literature that men's and women's participation in de Coubertin's Olympic Games was significantly different, that there was a certain polarity with respect to social expectations about female and male athletes, and that organizers were mainly interested in the performance of men. While it is well documented that women's participation was limited in comparison to men and that leaders were eager to showcase the abilities of male athletes as indices of competitive progress in the sporting world, there has been little academic attention directed toward a specific delineation of these processes of gender organization. With this in mind, it is suggested that a gender dynamic, based in configurations of practice, emerged early on in the Games. This dynamic was not merely representational in its polarizing of social experience; rather it was instrumental in validating a transnational organization of sport, sustained in form for the rest of the twentieth century. As such, it was not just a matter of participation and control. Indeed, the seemingly simple policy decisions of the International Olympic Committee (IOC), the organization of events, and the contexts of interpretive framing provided by Games' organizers and the press, were some of the main foundations from which the structures of participation and consumption of international sport emerged. These structures of experience framed sport for men and women, at times glamorizing or abjecting particular expressions of symbolic masculinity and femininity, and created boundaries of gender organization which influenced physical culture in many parts of the world.

This paper argues that the processes of gender organization inherent in IOC policy were not linear. Nor did they emanate unidirectionally from such international sport organizations. Rather, leading members of national and international sporting culture, the popular press, and athletes themselves stabilized configurations of practices through a politicized, somewhat ambiguous, decision-making schemata, based in particular notions about sexuality, physicality, and athletic performance. Evidence for these arguments is based in organizational records of the IOC, minutes of meetings, personal correspondence of early IOC presidents, press reports of Olympic Games and other sporting events, literature which focuses on the issues of physicality, sexuality and athletic performance, and a variety of secondary sources. This study addresses some significant issues on the gender organization of culture with respect to sport and physicality, particularly the influence of the Olympic Games on historical notions about culturally appropriate maleness and femaleness.