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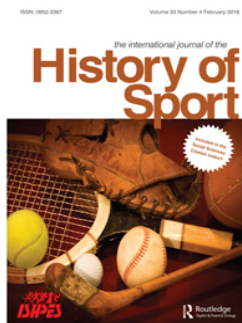
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## Gender Politics, the Olympic Games, and Road Cycling: A Case for Critical History

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### ABSTRACT

Sexism is an ongoing problem within the Olympic Games, and in broader society. Historians are well placed to analyze social change over time and have a role to play in transforming gendered meanings that contribute to cultural sexism. However, to have real political effects, historians need to pay greater attention to the contradictory, discontinuous, and complex aspects of gender history, and contextualize women's experiences within the whole field of gender relations. In this paper, a critical historical approach inspired by Michel Foucault and Joan W. Scott is proposed as a means to achieve this goal. The case of road cycling is used as an example to illustrate how Olympic historians might approach a topic from this critical perspective.

### KEYWORDS

Olympics; sexism; gender; critical history; cycling

The Olympics have always been a site of sexism.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, as Kevin Wamsley and Gertrud Pfister state, access to opportunities and rewards have been remarkably different for men and women.<sup>2</sup> This direct exclusion and inequality has often been attributed to the gendered structure of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and its policies, and as such the modern Olympics have been described as being entrenched in institutionalized sexism.<sup>3</sup> For example, 'eligibility rules restricting who could participate in the Olympic Games date back to the first meeting of the IOC in 1894, when the IOC gave itself the authority to set eligibility parameters for the first modern Olympic Games'.<sup>4</sup> Sarah Teetzel goes on to describe the changes in policy that slowly made room for the official inclusion of women across a number of different sports.<sup>5</sup> In the latest version of the Olympic charter, it states that it is part of the Olympic movement's mission and role: 'to encourage and support the promotion of women in sport at all levels and in all structures with a view to implementing the principle of equality of men and women'.<sup>6</sup> The inclusion of this aim could be read as an attempt to ameliorate the discrimination that the IOC has practiced since its inception. While this policy change demonstrates some 'progress' in relation to gender inequality, this paper is less concerned with the official structure and policies of the IOC and instead takes a position that significant ideological effects function beyond the IOC, meaning that despite policies aimed at equality, cultural sexism is likely to remain.

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Like other sporting contexts, the Olympics have been a site for ‘creating ideologies of male dominance, where images, beliefs and practices of masculine power and superiority are continually replayed and reproduced ... alongside those that denigrate femininity, women and their sporting activities.’<sup>7</sup> As Gertrud Pfister has argued ‘the Olympic Games have a long history of inequities and, moreover, a foundation of basic meanings about sport predicated on gender differences and distinctions.’<sup>8</sup> In other words, not only do the Olympics have a history of excluding people from taking part based on their sex, but the Olympics and its associated symbols, practices, and texts also reproduce or reinforce the meanings (and accompanying hierarchies) that are assigned to each sex. According to Wamsley and Pfister, this form of cultural power has in part been achieved through the production and reception of various media texts. However, as will be argued throughout this paper, historical narratives are another type of text that can reproduce, reinforce, or indeed challenge gendered meanings. If the assertion that the Olympics have always been a site of sexism is accepted, then it follows that all Olympic histories are entwined with gender politics, and all Olympic historians are by default implicated in the cultural production of gender.

All historians make choices about their questions, their subject matter and their forms of analysis and representation.<sup>9</sup> Therefore, regardless of whether a historian explicitly claims to be motivated by gender politics or not, those choices lead to either a reinforcement of, or challenge to, the status quo – status quo here is taken to mean the ‘cultural hegemony broadly ensuring the authority of men over women with respect to defining, shaping, and controlling the parameters of sport.’<sup>10</sup> The point here is not to pass judgement over those historians who choose to produce histories which conform to the status quo but rather to make clear that all historians make political choices, and those choices do have political consequences with regard to the ways in which meanings are ascribed and reinscribed and sex.

While all Olympic histories are gendered in some way, there is a body of historical work that has explicitly taken up the subject of women’s involvement in the Olympics.<sup>11</sup> This work examines the processes of change that have allowed women access to certain sports and events at different times. Those historians have chosen to write women into the past, to ensure that their legacy as legitimate actors in the social world is preserved. Whether intentional or not, such texts provide a direct ideological challenge to the status quo of Olympic and sport history in which men are the primary agents, and women’s impact and involvement has largely been ignored or marginalized.

In addition to inserting women’s involvement into the historical record, by making space for women in history some of those historians are also implicitly making an ethical claim about equality in the present. However, this hope has not yet been realized – sexism remains rife in and outside of sport. A clear gender hierarchy remains in sport – females are still viewed as either lesser athletes than male athletes, or less ‘female’ than female non-athletes. In other words, increasing the number of stories about women’s involvement has not transformed the meanings assigned to sex. So what has happened? Why hasn’t an increase in histories about women led to greater overall equality in sport, or society?

### **Problematizing ‘Women’s History’**

Joan Wallach Scott provides some clues from mainstream history. In her analyses, she explains that the advent of women’s history generated new scholarship on the lives and experiences of women in the past. The new knowledge demonstrated what previous accounts

implicitly denied: women were significant actors.<sup>12</sup> Scott argues that this approach might produce interesting and valuable stories, but at the same time there is a problem in these narratives because historians assumed they knew what the category ‘women’ was they forgot, or failed, to investigate its production.<sup>13</sup> Instead they opted to ‘ascribe its negative aspects to “patriarchy” or male dominance, its positive aspects to women’s resistance or “agency” without in either case examining how “women” acquired social and political meaning in particular contexts.’<sup>14</sup> She goes on to state: ‘Having made women visible, historians had also established their difference’. Scott’s analysis of historical practice and its implications for feminism raise significant issues for the field of sport history and in particular how to approach the subject of the involvement of women in the Olympics. Despite this, Scott’s work has not been taken up seriously by many historians working on sport.<sup>15</sup> This paper uses a case study of women’s cycling and the inclusion of the road race in 1984 to illustrate how power is embedded in the very practice of researching and writing Olympic history.

### ***Problematizing the ‘Inclusion Narratives’ in Olympic History***

A conventional approach to a history on gender, Olympics, and road cycling would probably ask: what were the major forces that led to the inclusion of the road race for women in 1984? Indeed, this kind of approach is evident in articles about the inclusion of women’s athletics, women’s rowing in 1972, and women’s participation more generally.<sup>16</sup> All of these studies are excellent examples of historical scholarship as the discipline defines it. However, they are all bound, and thus constrained, by the limits of their questions. A problem with this is that the ‘historic moment’ of the inclusion of a specific event (usually for women) is seen as an end point, it is often implied in such narratives that getting in, is enough. However, as Scott suggests:

The idea of access is represented metaphorically as passages through doors and gates, over obstacles, barriers, and blockages. Accessibility is most often measured quantitatively – the number of individuals or members of groups who gain entry. While this kind of discussion has been useful and important for detecting discrimination or democratization, it has also drawn attention away from certain qualitative issues. How are those who cross the thresholds received? If they belong to a group different from the one already ‘inside’, what are the terms of their incorporation? How do the new arrivals understand their relationship to the place they have entered? What are the terms of identity they establish?<sup>17</sup>

Given Scott’s quotation above, if sexism in society is to be taken seriously then the notion that more access to the Olympics will necessarily produce long-term social change in the field of gender relations needs to be problematized. This is not to suggest that the inclusion of particular events (for men and for women) cannot tell us anything about gender and the Olympics – they certainly give a sense of the structural struggles and successes that were required to get certain events admitted into the Olympic programme. But they assign too much initial power to the ‘patriarchy’ who keeps them out (the IOC) and assign too much causality to women’s agency and resistance (getting in). As Scott states above, looking at historical evidence in this way is useful for identifying moments and processes of discrimination. However, the issue lies with the level of political effectiveness those histories can have in transforming gender relations and eliminating sexism more broadly.

At the Olympic Studies Centre in Lausanne, there are several boxes of materials that relate to cycling and the Olympic Games. If one was to write an inclusion narrative about the

admission of the road race for women at the Olympic Games, they would find correspondence between the International Federation for Amateur Cycling (FIAC) and the IOC, and minutes containing information where there are several attempts made to include women's road cycling in the Olympic programme. As is discussed below, there is ample evidence in those boxes to construct a conventional historical narrative that centres on detailing the struggle and success of gaining access to the Olympic programme; however, the point of the example is to highlight some of the limitations to that approach.

In the correspondence exists an impassioned letter from Mrs Eileen Gray.<sup>18</sup> Gray was the president of the Women's Cycle Racing Association in Britain. She wrote a letter to President of the IOC, Lord Killanin, in 1973. She outlines in this letter that she had previously met Lord Killanin two to three years prior at a sportswriters' dinner in London and during their meeting they had discussed the inclusion of a women's race at the Olympics. In 1973, she writes 'Your advice to me at the time was to get the support of the Governing body which I assured you we already had.'<sup>19</sup> There is archival evidence of the support that Gray is referring to here. In particular, there is correspondence that proves that the FIAC had tried to get a women's race included in the Tokyo 1964 games. Otto Mayer put the issue to the President of the Games of the XVIII Olympiad on 8 May 1962 – stating that he had received a request from the "Union Cycliste Internationale" asking for inclusion of cyclists' events for women in the Tokyo games.<sup>20</sup>

Gray goes on to write

I have now had the opportunity of a long discussion with M. Pacciarelli secretary of the Federation International Association of Cycling who assures me that as strong a case as possible was put to you that women should be included in the games. He was kind enough to show me the very terse sentence in a letter dealing with other matters where the plea was rejected without further comment.<sup>21</sup>

Gray is also accurate about the outcome referred to here – in a letter from Arthur Takac (technical director) dated 16 October 1970, he closes stating 'I should also inform you that the proposal to include women's cycling in the programme was not accepted by the IOC.'<sup>22</sup>

Further correspondence between the two parties suggests that administrative inadequacy was the barrier to the inclusion of a road race for women in the Olympic programme. The IOC demanded more supporting information to ensure that women's cycling fit the criteria of 'international' sport. After several attempts the FIAC had still not satisfied the IOC's request. However, there are some issues with definitions here because the sport of cycling had been an ongoing part of the Olympic programme since 1912 (and had existed in the first Olympic Games in 1896 but fell off the programme between 1900 and 1908). So what FIAC were trying to include in the programme was in fact another 'event', not an additional sport. Moreover, Eileen Gray puts forward a fairly comprehensive argument that fulfils the criteria required by the IOC, and further research is required to see why she was not utilized by the FIAC in the original applications. So in analyzing the archival material it could be argued that one of the causes for the 20-year delay to be included was mere administrative delays on the part of the FIAC.

However, a more cynical reader might note that there was also an issue going on between the two parties – during the time period at which applications were received and denied, the cycling federation was constantly under pressure from the IOC with regard to the professionalism/amateurism scandals.<sup>23</sup> FIAC was constantly being required to defend the amateur arm of its sport and during this time was subject to many complaints from Olympic

officials about athletes receiving rewards for cycling – this seemed to be a particular problem in Australia. While it is not clear in the correspondence that this ‘cloud’ had a direct impact on the repeated decline of the application it may have been responsible for a tense relationship between the FIAC and the IOC.

Inclusion narratives are common in the field of Olympic history and they clearly contain valuable information about the processes through which different events become ‘available’ for women. However, the issue is that the same histories do not exist to the same degree, or in the same form, for male sports. This is a problem because it obscures the general bureaucratic hurdles that are faced by the International Federations who try and get as many events in the Olympic programme as possible. The disproportionate amount of inclusion narratives about women reinscribes the problem of women ‘as victims’ of the structure without looking at whether the level of ‘struggle’ is the same for men. Hargreaves makes this error when she states that female athletes through their spectacular achievements have over time ‘put pressure on the decision-making bodies of Olympic sports to enlarge the women’s programme’.<sup>24</sup> The error here is in naming it ‘the women’s programme’ as there is no such thing. Ever since the International Federations and the IOC worked together to look at what is included in the programme, there are just events within different sports. Thinking about this in terms of the inclusion of different ‘events’ rather than already thinking about it in terms of some kind of breaking of a barrier for ‘women’ might open up further analyses that allow us to better understand the different workings of power that operate between the structural (IOC policy and bureaucratic level) and the broader cultural or ideological spheres. With this in mind future research could look at the struggles of men’s events too in order to examine the ways in which gender has been discursively produced in and through the ‘inclusion’ process.

There is a further issue with the historical approach which merely just wants to trace the inclusion of particular Olympic events for women. As Ferez explains ‘to understand how the sporting establishment organizes and constructs gender relations and interactions, it is necessary to go beyond the simple question of whether access is permitted to different activities’.<sup>25</sup> Following Ferez’s line of thought with regard to policy this can be extended to thinking about inclusion narratives, which on the whole support the structure that is already in place. That is, writing about the inclusion of a female event as a significant historic moment is also a way of emphasizing gender difference and reinforcing constructions of ‘manliness’ and ‘womanliness’.<sup>26</sup>

Furthermore, given that female athletes have not experienced sexism in the same ways, rather differences have occurred depending on the sport and/or events, and have had different effects based on athletes’ race, class, nationality, and sexuality, it is clear that ‘gender relations in the Olympics and the phenomena of the gender order in the Olympic Games are clearly complex’.<sup>27</sup> Olympic histories that attempt to attend to gender politics and sexism by focusing solely on the inclusion stories of particular events are also missing the complexity of the broader field of cultural production of meaning both in and through history and fail to fully address Scott’s questions about ‘How are those who cross the thresholds received’ and ‘What are the terms of identity they establish?’

If the degree of gender equality in sport is measured by looking at the increasing access given to women across a range of different sports and events over time, it is seen that the number has increased most years since the 1908 Olympic Games. However, just looking at the inclusion of events ignores the possibility for complexity identified above. If Scott’s point about the role of history is taken seriously and considered with gender theorist Raewyn

Connell's conceptualization that 'gender is not a fixed system, but a complex, historically changing and tension-ridden structure of relationships, always open to change' then it is evident that the so-called herstory approach fails to fully account for the complexity of gender relations.<sup>28</sup> This has particular relevance for feminist historians working on sport and who are interested in effecting long-term social change.

### Critical History, Genealogy, and Histories of the Present

While Scott, as stated above, is pessimistic about the political effectiveness of 'women's history' she does not write off the political and ethical potential of history altogether. She claims that historians do have a role to play in transforming gender relations, but that it requires a fully critical approach because the conventional method of doing (women's) history actually reproduces the conditions which produce the inequality to begin with.<sup>29</sup> To this end Scott advocates for critical history.

A useful starting point for understanding critical historical practice is to look at the work of Michel Foucault. Foucault's historical work has had a rather patchy reception both within the discipline of history generally, but perhaps even more so in the field of sports history. Indeed, as Joan W. Scott writes:

many historians, missing the critical epistemological thrust of Foucault's work, have either quarrelled with his choice of topic, periodization, or facts (in an effort to discredit him) or (in an effort to emulate him) read his work thematically as a call to study more asylums, prisons, or sexual norms, now in comparative perspective.<sup>30</sup>

Scott goes on to argue that this is to miss the point and to 'misread Foucault's attempt to theorise critique as an operation of history-writing'.<sup>31</sup> Scott is right about this; Foucault himself stated that the findings of his historical work were not concrete theories about the truth of the social world. Instead, he thought that if there was any utility in his method it was to help others ask questions, and that those questions should direct us to concrete historical investigations, investigations that may offer different explanations than his.<sup>32</sup>

There have been several criticisms about the quality of Foucault's investigations. On one hand, critics have stated that his work is too empirically weak to be considered 'real' history; and on the other, it has been deemed to be too tainted with sources to be taken seriously as philosophy. The strength of his work is that he did both, and in so doing shows how the history of ideas, and the idea of history are inseparable and can be studied simultaneously.<sup>33</sup> Foucault practiced critical history (he called his approach genealogy) by taking a problem of the present and working backwards to understand how things came to be the way they are. For Foucault genealogical inquiry aims to 'transform the present' by grasping (more fully) what it is.<sup>34</sup> In particular he was interested in how history works to 'establish the necessity of certain exclusions and obligatory social behaviors'.<sup>35</sup> To do this involves asking the following crucial question: 'In what is given to us as universal, necessary, obligatory, what place is occupied by whatever is singular, contingent, and the product of arbitrary constraints?'.<sup>36</sup>

Though its materials come from the archives of the past the object of Foucault's critical history-writing is very much the present. For Foucault, a critical history (or genealogy) is a historical investigation into the events that have led us to constitute ourselves as subjects of what we are doing, thinking, saying.<sup>37</sup> Scott also outlines two other thinkers who explain what critical history is, and what it can do and their ideas will be explicitly taken up in the cycling example that follows. For example, Scott quotes David Hoy who explains:



The effect of critical history is temporal: it focuses our attention on the present. Critical history, however, does this with neither the rationalist intent of making the present seem the culmination of all that has gone before, nor the neo-conservative intent of preserving the status quo. Instead ... the intent is to make certain the present is still open to the future despite its problematic connection to the past.<sup>38</sup>

This is a key aspect when thinking in relation to the 'ethical' intent of much feminist inspired history, which hopes for equality in the future. Scott also quotes Barbara Johnson who explains that 'critique reads backwards from what seems natural, obvious, self-evident or universal in order to show that these things have their history, their reasons for being the way they are, their effects on what follows from them.'<sup>39</sup> With these statements in mind, Scott then goes on to argue that the aim of critique 'is neither to justify nor to discredit, but to illuminate those blind-spots that keep social systems intact and make seeing how to change them so difficult.'<sup>40</sup>

Foucault did not directly deal with the social problem of sexism (in fact he was critiqued by some feminist scholars for producing sexist work). This is however again to miss the point of Foucault's method – he was not trying to provide an answer to all social problems but merely carried out historical investigations with those problems he saw to be particularly troubling in his time. Joan Scott is one of those scholars who did take Foucault's analyses seriously and her work is extremely useful to understand the role historians can play in examining inequality in the present. Scott not only explains the point of critique (and genealogy) in a very accessible way but she has also been able to operationalize those ideas in her own work, and shows us what this kind of work can look like, and do.<sup>41</sup> Scott has used this approach to *question*, rather than merely *write about* gender. Specifically, Scott argues that critical history should analyze the categories we most often take for granted: 'history, women, men, equality, difference.'<sup>42</sup> Scott goes on to state that 'We cannot write women into history, for example, unless we are willing to entertain the notion that history as a unified story was a fiction about a universal subject whose universality was achieved through implicit processes of differentiation, marginalization, and exclusion.'<sup>43</sup> In other words, rather than just assuming and writing about women (as a category), Scott urges feminist historians to examine the whole construction of 'woman' as it has been developed and used in specific historical contexts, and accounting for the fact that what counts as womanhood is the product of culture, politics, and time.<sup>44</sup>

Scott is cautious of simply applying 'social theories' of gender to historical phenomena. She states:

for the most part, the attempts of historians to theorize about gender have remained within traditional social scientific frameworks, using long-standing formulations that provide universal causal explanations. These theories have been limited at best because they tend to contain reductive or overly simple generalizations that undercut not only history's disciplinary sense of the complexity of social causation but also feminist commitments to analyses that will lead to change.<sup>45</sup>

Despite Scott's reluctance to use social theories 'as they are', reading Scott alongside Raewyn Connell's work has also been a productive way to interrogate gender politics, sport, and Olympic history. Connell has a particular appreciation for history and historical processes – she argues that in order to understand gender, and the ways it works to produce hierarchy, inequality, subordination, and oppression for some people, scholars need to look at the gender dynamic – not just on how social changes effected the status of 'women' but how

they changed the dynamic/fabric of gender itself.<sup>46</sup> Connell's concept is useful to critical feminist historians because she too argues that, in order to take into account the complex and discontinuous constructions of gender across time and space, there is a need to pose concrete historical problems in which gender and progress are not taken for granted concepts, but have their own assumptions and effects.<sup>47</sup>

To return again to the example of Olympic history and cycling, some of the limitations of constructing an inclusion narrative as the 'story' about women's road cycling have already been posed. But now, in light of the discussion above about critical history, some clues emerge as to how to conduct historical investigations about gender politics and the Olympics that may have a greater impact in the present.

### **Gender Politics and Cycling: Towards a Critical History**

The starting point for a critical history as stated in the previous section is to begin with a problem of the present and to work backwards. This is not to try and get to an 'origin', but to follow traces – paying particular attention to those which seem troubling, contradictory, complex, or discontinuous – in order to understand how things come to be the way they are, and with what effects. The starting point for this critical history is sexism, and the role that sport plays in helping and/or hindering equality. The problem is that feminist researchers and activists have been trying to understand and redress gender inequality in sport for four decades, yet layers of institutional and cultural sexism remain. However, there is a contradiction in how gender in/equality has been framed 'in time' by two groups of scholars. Sociologists – who continue to report that sexism remains rife in sport, despite years of feminist intervention. And historians, who have mostly written linear narratives of progress that assume each decade is better than the last, and as such have left out the discontinuities of history, and the realities of the present. This project on sexism traces cycling and includes the Olympics, but its starting point is not a historical moment, instead it begins with a premise – in practice sexism continues to be an urgent problem in sport; and theoretically, gender is still a complex question.

The purpose of critical history can be made explicit in the research question. Rather than ask 'what were the major forces that led to the inclusion of the road race for women in 1984' a more open question would be: 'in what ways does competitive road cycling reinforce or challenge the gender hierarchy?'. This approach from the outset is noticeably different to many of the historical articles that have written about the involvement or inclusion of women in particular events in the Olympic Games. Such a question fulfils the following points about critique and critical history that were discussed in the previous section: the intent is to make certain the present is still open to the future despite its problematic connection to the past; it reads backwards from what seems natural, obvious, self-evident, or universal to illuminate those blind-spots that keep social systems intact and make seeing how to change them so difficult.

The social system that seems natural, obvious, and self-evident in this case is that female cyclists are treated differently to males. Indeed, layers of institutional and cultural sexism exist within the sport and its governing bodies. The effects of sexism are felt especially hard in professional women's road racing – where there are rules and regulations for women that dictate shorter racing distances, fewer sanctioned events, and fewer opportunities to participate on the world's biggest cycling stage – Le Tour de France. Furthermore, recent

allegations published in the Cycling Independent Reform Commission report that elite female cyclists are subjected to financial and sexual exploitation.<sup>48</sup> The problematic connection to the past is that the bicycle has been cited as one of the key factors in securing emancipation for women in the nineteenth century. According to American civil rights leader Susan B Anthony, the 'freedom machine', did 'more to emancipate women than any one thing in the world'.<sup>49</sup>

When read alongside each other these two stories suggest that the common myth of social progress and the closing 'gender gap' is a simplistic way to think about sexism in the context of the history of the bicycle. The bicycle is central to this story, and it is with this piece of technology that the critique begins.

The discourse of the bicycle as a freedom machine comes about through histories of the 'emancipation of women'; in particular through histories that detail the way in which women used the new technology to rally together for political means. The bicycle was also utilized as an emancipatory tool for women who were not directly involved in the suffrage movements of the 1800s – for those women, the bicycle allowed them to easily leave the confines of their domestic walls to socialize with other women (and men) outside of their homes and chores. For example, Frances Willard describes the bicycle as 'an implement of power' and the woman on a bicycle apparently 'changed the conventions of courtship and chaperonage, of marriage and of travel'.<sup>50</sup> And as Garvey describes the new mobility the bicycle allowed offered freer movement in new spheres, outside the family and home – 'heady new freedoms that feminists celebrated'.<sup>51</sup> The freedom machine is also cited as physically emancipating women as bicycle riding came to be viewed as a (relatively) acceptable form of activity for women.

These historical facts are not disputed, however this 'freedom machine' discourse is somewhat problematic because it ignores the ways in which the bicycle either did the same (or not) for men and only skirts around the possibility that while women were shaped by the bicycle, the bicycle too was being shaped by women and men in particular, historically specific (and Eurocentric) ways. This is significant for a project seeking to understand sexism in and through sport because it ignores the potentially more subtle ways in which the bike was manufactured 'for women' and how women learnt to ride those 'freedom machines' in different ways to men, but importantly it also highlights the ways in which historical narratives (about women) can also do work that ignores the complexities and the ongoing discursive construction of gendered subjects.

While the freedom machine discourse is underpinned by assumptions that the new technology was gender neutral, and this was the reason women were able to use it and through it redefine their gender 'role', this misses the fact that the safety cycle (albeit a new development), already had a gendered history. The predecessor to the safety cycle, was the 'high wheeler' a machine that has been stated was 'masculine' and almost exclusively for the use of men. As Garvey argues, from the beginning the safety cycle is manufactured and advertised with specific gendered messages to allay the fears of women (and men) who assumed the safety bicycle (like the high wheeler) was 'masculine'.<sup>52</sup>

To this end, manufacturers differentiated models of bicycles. It is fairly well known that the diamond-shaped frame was designed for men, and a drop frame for riding in a skirt was developed for women. What is less well known is that the diamond frame was structurally stronger than the drop frame, so manufacturers made the drop frame 10 pounds heavier to make up for it. While the freedom machine may have been emancipatory in one

sense, the ways in which it was possible to ride were being reinforced by the technology itself. Not all differentiation techniques were this profound. Garvey cites an example from an advertisement in 1895 for a bicycle sold as a 'women's bicycle' that bears no difference to the regular diamond-frame bicycle for men in its shape or style, but only in name: a name which has the effect of reinforcing difference.<sup>53</sup> Other names were used to make this differentiation such as the 'Josephine' for women and 'Napoleon' for men.<sup>54</sup> The issue with classification or categorization is not in and of itself problematic. What is problematic and which has been identified in the research is the judgement placed on that categorization, or when individuals are seen not to fit the expectations associated to that category. In the case of the 'freedom machine' there were a diverse range of meanings attached to bicyclists. For example, cartoons in magazines such as *Life* and *Punch* satirized women bicyclists as 'mannishly dressed menaces'.<sup>55</sup> However, manufacturers (who were obviously interested in broadening their market reach) displayed very young women riding in daringly short skirts, and also images of 'respectable' women who were used to show that the bicycle could be ridden with grace and even modesty.<sup>56</sup>

As bicycles became more popular people also became interested in testing how fast and how far they could travel on these new two-wheeled machines. In particular the 'scorching' position was developed to increase speed. Scorching refers to the body posture that was employed to create the most momentum (especially downhill). This posture disturbed some physicians who thought it was unnatural for women to ride in this way. For example:

the moment speed is desired the body is bent forward in a characteristic curve and the body's weight is transmitted to the narrow anterior half of the saddle, with all the weight pressing on the perineal region ... If a saddle is properly adjusted for slow riding and in an unusual effort at speed or hill climbing, the body is then thrown forward, causing the clothing to press against the clitoris, thereby eliciting and arousing feelings hitherto unknown and unrealized by the young maiden.<sup>57</sup>

It was suggested that to preserve the sexual purity of female riders that they instead stick to riding 'Ramblers' which in accordance with instructions in one manual could be created by setting the handlebars several inches higher for women than for men.<sup>58</sup> However, in keeping with the critical approach, it is important not to 'totalize' this evidence, as there are several examples that contradict this discourse of restriction.

The following examples provide some further historical context to the ways that women were using their bicycles in the late 1800s to test their physical limits. There is evidence that in 1869, women in France entered bicycle races for the first time.<sup>59</sup> Across the Atlantic, in 1888 women join bicycle clubs in Chicago in the USA and in 1889 women contest a six-day endurance race at Madison Square gardens. Endurance races and distance contests became quite popular at this time and a woman by the name of Annie Kopchevsky (aka Annie Londonderry – her sponsored name) cycled around the world in 1894.<sup>60</sup> According to Dave Russell, British competitive cycling dates back to the 1870s.<sup>61</sup> And in the Australian context, Fiona Kinsey discovered that 'endurance riding was probably the most popular and highest-profile competitive cycling activity for Australian women in the 1890s'. Kinsey identifies at least 20 Australian women as being endurance riders during the 1890s, a period she describes as being 'renowned for the popularity of long-distance cycling'.<sup>62</sup> Other notable events that demonstrate women's capacity and desire to ride and compete over long distances include evidence of a woman trying to enter Tour de France 1908; Alfonsina Strada racing in Giro di Lombardia in 1917/1918 and in Giro d'Italia 1924.<sup>63</sup> And the 'Tour de France de

Feminin' which was first staged in 1955 and won by Millie Robertson. This was a five stage event with 41 riders.

These traces are important because when researchers, in particular sociologists, look at how women are treated differently to men today this history can be used to contest some of the excuses that are used to limit or restrict women's experiences in competitive cycling because they are not physically capable. However, taking a critical approach they need to be analysed not necessarily as a chronology but within the context of other contradictory evidence which illustrates the complex ways in which cycling and women are products and producers of meaning, and with what effects.

One historian who goes some way towards a critical approach is Shelley Lucas in her examination of the meanings that distances have acquired within women's road racing from the 1950s–1990s.<sup>64</sup> Lucas identifies how distances for women are always different to men's races and demonstrates some contradictions between the UCI mission statement and the regulations that are placed on female riders. For example, according to the UCI, cycling in general is defined as 'an endurance sport which requires courage, perseverance, a fighting spirit and going beyond one's limitations'; road cycling as an event within that sport encompasses 'courage, heroism and going beyond one's limitations'.<sup>65</sup> Yet what Lucas argues is there is a contradiction operating here because there are major limitations placed on females with regard to racing distances – men's distances generally double the length of women's. Lucas's work is significant because it clearly locates women's experiences of cycling within the broader discourse of the sport of cycling – that is, that distances acquire meaning and value in relation to each other and in turn reinforce differences between the sexes. Based on the reality of women's physical capacities, this move to continue to restrict women could perhaps be read as one of the 'blind spots' identified by Scott in the previous section.

As it has already been stated, and as Lucas notes, the summer of 1984 is a pivotal season 'in the history and development' of women's road cycling.<sup>66</sup> Not only is this the year that the road race for women is first held but also the Tour de Feminin is reinstated, a full tour held alongside the men's (albeit with shorter stage distances). However, as elements of this critical history approach have revealed – statements about progress and development are quite problematic. Especially when the present context, in which females have fewer opportunities to test their physical capacities at the Olympic Games (shorter race) and in most other UCI sanctioned events in the yearly season, is taken into account. Indeed, women no longer race in their version of Le Tour de France but in 2014 were 'awarded' the opportunity to race in la Course – a one-stage, criterium-style event held on the Champs Elyse on the final day of Le Tour de France. While women's events are 'included' it cannot be concluded that this is evidence of progress in terms of equality between the sexes.

Inclusion in events and competitions reflect some structural change in organizations like the IOC or the UCI. At the same time though it needs to be acknowledged, as Hargreaves has argued, women's participation in Olympic sports and events and their treatment as athletes (albeit still not equal with men) is relatively less unequal than in elite sporting contexts outside of the Olympic Games. This presents another interesting contradiction. That is, the Olympic movement has potentially both empowered and oppressed women, and the Olympic Games can be read or interpreted as both a site of social progress and of social constraint.<sup>67</sup> There is a problem with isolating the Olympics and then reading them as more 'progressive' than other sporting contexts because they are part of the world not separate from it. The Olympic Games exists within a broader ideological context whereby

in the twenty-first century women's sport is still not held in the same regard as men's. It is at the cultural level where sexism in sport is entrenched and indeed still accepted as obvious, natural, and self-evident. Being included is not the same as living in a society where cultural beliefs and social practices are not 'premised on the superiority of one sex.'<sup>68</sup>

Following Connell's argument that 'gender history is lumpy' then it is not surprising to see that 'there are moments of transition, when the conditions of practice alter fast; there are periods of more or less steady shift in a given direction; and there are periods when a particular balance of forces is stabilised.'<sup>69</sup> The point here is that there is a continuing process at play and every time female cyclists ride their freedom machines they are entering into a historical process of meaning production that exists beyond the structural effects of the IOC.

Power is embedded in the Olympic movement (as Hargreaves has articulated so clearly) but power is also operating at the level of Olympic history. As such, the conceptual tools and assumptions that historians use to tell the story about women and the Olympic Games is part of the world historians are attempting to describe. Therefore, it is vital that historians continue to ask how Olympic histories reproduce, challenge, or transform the systems of power based on gender that operate within the Olympic movement and in society more broadly.<sup>70</sup>

## Conclusion

Drawing from the insights and critical methods of Foucault and Scott, it has been argued in this paper that Olympic historians need further tools and methods to examine issues of gender politics. To this end a critical history approach has been proposed. The critical approach ensures that historians are aware of the role they play in not just discovering and describing the past but actively constructing and reinscribing cultural meanings. Undertaking such an analysis is difficult because it follows traces rather than predetermined narrative structures, and it is frustrating because it asks more questions than it answers. The cycling examples provided here illustrate the sorts of questions that a critical history might ask and opens up further discussion about how to do Olympic history and what it can achieve. By inciting debate it will hopefully go some way to achieving the overarching goal of this research project which is to transform gender relations, not merely reproduce them.

## Notes

1. M. Ann Hall, *Sport and Gender: A Feminist Perspective on the Sociology of Sport* (Ontario: CAHPER, 1978), 13. The author is using M. Ann Hall's statement that cultural beliefs and social practices are sexist if they are premised on the superiority of one sex, usually but not always the male, and the accompanying masculine (or feminine) values.
2. K. Wamsley and G. Pfister, 'Olympic Men and Women: The Politics of Gender in the Modern Games', in K. Young and K. Wamsley (eds), *Global Olympics: Historical and Sociological Studies of the Modern Games* (London: Elsevier, 2005), 103–25.
3. Jaime Schultz, 'Disciplining Sex: "Gender Verification" Policies and Women's Sport', in H. Lenskyj and S. Wagg (eds), *Handbook of Olympic Studies* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 443–60.
4. Sarah Teetzel, 'Rules and Reform: Eligibility, Gender Differences, and the Olympic Games', *Sport in Society* 14, no. 3 (2011), 386–9.
5. *Ibid.*, 386.

6. International Olympic Committee, *Olympic Charter* (Lausanne: International Olympic Committee, 2015), 18, [http://www.olympic.org/documents/olympic\\_charter\\_en.pdf](http://www.olympic.org/documents/olympic_charter_en.pdf) (accessed 30 October 2015).
7. Wamsley and Pfister, 'Olympic Men and Women', 111.
8. Gertrud Pfister, 'Women and the Olympic Games', in B. Drinkwater (ed.), *Women in Sport* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 3–19.
9. Douglas Booth, *The Field: Truth and Fiction in Sport History* (London: Routledge, 2005); Douglas Booth, 'Evidence Revisited: Interpreting Historical Materials in Sport History', *Rethinking History* 9, no. 4 (2005), 459–83. This point is not a wholly novel one. Booth has been instrumental in pointing this out in the field of sport history. However, Booth's examination and commentary mostly focuses on the choices historians make in terms of their sources, forms of analysis, and modes of representation – rather than focusing primarily on the questions historians ask, what their histories are about, and the political consequences in terms of social inequality and oppression which is the issue that is taken up in this paper.
10. Wamsley and Pfister, 'Olympic Men and Women', 104.
11. Wamsley and Pfister, 'Olympic Men and Women', 103–25; Allen Guttmann, *Women's Sports: A History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992); Jennifer Hargreaves, *Sporting Females: Critical Issues in the History and Sociology of Women's Sports* (London: Routledge, 1994); U. Simri, *Women at the Olympic Games* (Netanya: Wingate Institute for Physical Education and Sport, 1979); and Betty Spears 'Women in the Olympics: An Unresolved Problem', in P. Graham and H. Ueberhorst (eds), *The Modern Olympics* (Cornwall, NY: Leisure Press, 1972), 62–82. All provide a good starting point to explore this literature.
12. Joan W. Scott, 'History and Difference', *Daedalus* 16, no. 4 (1987), 93–118; Joan W. Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999); and Joan W. Scott, 'Gender: A Useful Category of Analysis', *The American Historical Review* 91, no. 5 (1986), 1053–75.
13. Scott, 'History and Difference', 110–1.
14. Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History*, 54.
15. June Senyard, 'The Imagined Golf Course: Gender Representations and Australian Golf', *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 15, no. 2 (1998), 164–75. An example of a historical study in sport that goes some way to realizing this type of questioning of gender is June Senyard's article on golf. Here, Senyard is drawing from Joan W. Scott's work to understand sport as upholding gender binaries, but at the same time she uses cartoons to illustrate the changing and changeable nature of gendered ideology. Senyard's work is exemplary because she questions what gender is, what sport is, what the relationships between men and women are, and how those change or remain the same over time. Senyard ties women's successes and failures in sport to the broader ideological context, paying particular attention to contradictions and paradoxes of gender.
16. M. Leigh, and T. Bonin, 'The Pioneering Role of Alice Milliat and the FSFI in Establishing International Track and Field Competition for Women', *Journal of Sport History* 4, no. 1 (1977), 72–83; Amanda N. Schweinbenz, 'Selling Femininity: The Introduction of Women's Rowing at the 1976 Olympic Games', *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 26, no. 5 (2009), 654–72; and Jaime Schultz, 'Going the Distance: The Road to the 1984 Olympic Women's Marathon', *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 31, no. 1 (2015), 72–88.
17. Scott, 'History and Difference', 93.
18. Correspondence between Mrs Eileen Gray and Lord Killanin (IOC), 1973, IOC archives.
19. Correspondence between Mrs Eileen Gray and Lord Killanin (IOC), 1973, IOC archives.
20. Correspondence between Otto Mayer (IOC) put the issue to the President of the Games of the XVIII Olympiad, 8 May 1962, IOC archives.
21. Correspondence between Mrs Eileen Gray and Lord Killanin (IOC), 1973, IOC archives.
22. Correspondence between Arthur Takac (IOC technical director) and M. Pacciarelli secretary of the Federation International Association of Cycling, 16 October 1970, at the IOC Historical Archives, Olympic Studies Centre, Lausanne, Switzerland.

23. Minutes of the Meetings of the IOC Executive Board, Lausanne, 27–30 May 1972, at the IOC Historical Archives, Olympic Studies Centre, Lausanne, Switzerland. Basketball, Handball, and Rowing events for women were all approved and Cycling not approved at the IOC meeting in Luxembourg. See minutes of the 71st Session of the International Olympic Committee, Luxembourg, 15–17 September 1971, at the IOC Historical Archives, Olympic Studies Centre, Lausanne, Switzerland.
24. Hargreaves, *Sporting Females*, 217.
25. S. Ferez, 'From Women's Exclusion to Gender Institution: A Brief History of the Sexual Categorisation Process within Sport', *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 29, no. 2 (2012), 272–85.
26. *Ibid.*, 276.
27. Wamsley and Pfister, 'Olympic Men and Women', 121.
28. Raewyn Connell, 'Supremacy and Subversion – Gender Struggles in Sport', *Asia-Pacific Journal of Health, Sport and Physical Education* 3, no. 3 (2012), 178.
29. Scott, 'Gender', 1075.
30. Joan W. Scott, 'History-Writing as Critique', in K. Jenkins, S. Morgan and A. Munslow (eds), *Manifestos for History* (London: Routledge, 2007), 19–38.
31. *Ibid.*, 28.
32. *Ibid.*, 29.
33. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Penguin Books, 1977); Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1: Introduction*, trans. Peter Hurley (New York: Vintage, 1980).
34. Michel Foucault, 'What is Enlightenment?', trans. C. Porter, in Paul Rabinow (ed.), *The Essential Works of Michel Foucault, 1954–1984, Vol. 1* (New York: New Press, 1997), 315.
35. Scott, 'History-Writing as Critique', 28.
36. Foucault, 'What is Enlightenment?', 315.
37. Scott, 'History-Writing as Critique', 27.
38. *Ibid.*, 27.
39. *Ibid.*, 23.
40. *Ibid.*
41. Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History*.
42. Scott, 'Gender'; Judith Butler and Elizabeth Weed, 'Introduction', in Judith Butler and Elizabeth Weed (eds), *The Question of Gender: Joan W. Scott's Critical Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011), 1–10.
43. Scott, 'History and Difference', 112.
44. *Ibid.*, 112.
45. Scott, 'Gender', 1075.
46. R. Connell, *Gender and Power* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1987).
47. *Ibid.*
48. D. Marty, P. Nicholson, and U. Haas, 'Report to the President of the Union Cycliste Internationale' (Lausanne: Cycling Independent Reform Commission, 2015), [http://www.uci.ch/mm/Document/News/CleanSport/16/87/99/CIRCReport2015\\_Neutral.pdf](http://www.uci.ch/mm/Document/News/CleanSport/16/87/99/CIRCReport2015_Neutral.pdf) (accessed 2 November 2015).
49. I. Harper, *The Life and Work of Susan B. Anthony*, (Salem, NH: Ayer Co, 1983), 859.
50. Ellen Gruber Garvey, 'Reframing the Bicycle: Advertising-Supported Magazines and Scorching Women', *American Quarterly* 47, no. 1 (1995), 66–101.
51. *Ibid.*, 72.
52. *Ibid.*, 66–101.
53. *Ibid.*, 69.
54. *Ibid.*
55. *Ibid.*, 70.
56. Cited in *ibid.*, 70.
57. Garvey, 'Reframing the Bicycle', 76.
58. *Ibid.*, 76.



59. Jereon Heijmans and Bill Mallon, *Historical Dictionary of Cycling* (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2011), 315–23.
60. Heijmans and Mallon, *Historical Dictionary of Cycling*.
61. Dave Russell, 'Mum's the Word: the Cycling Career of Beryl Burton, 1956–1986', *Women's History Review* 17, no. 5 (2008), 787–806.
62. Fiona Kinsey, 'Stamina, Speed and Adventure: Australian Women and Competitive Cycling in the 1890s', *The International Journal of the Sport History* 28, no. 10 (2011), 1375–87.
63. Heijmans and Mallon, *Historical Dictionary of Cycling*.
64. Shelley Lucas, 'Women's Cycle Racing: Enduring Meanings', *Journal of Sport History* 38, no. 2 (2012), 227–42.
65. *Ibid.*, 227–8.
66. *Ibid.*, 229.
67. Holly Thorpe, 'Jibbing the Gender Order: Females in the Snowboarding Culture', *Sport in Society* 8, no. 1 (2005), 76–100.
68. Hall, *Sport and Gender*, 13.
69. Connell, *Gender and Power*, 149.
70. Hargreaves, *Sporting Females*, 208–34.

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